



Alexander Technique

INTERNATIONAL

— *ExChange* —

WINTER 2022

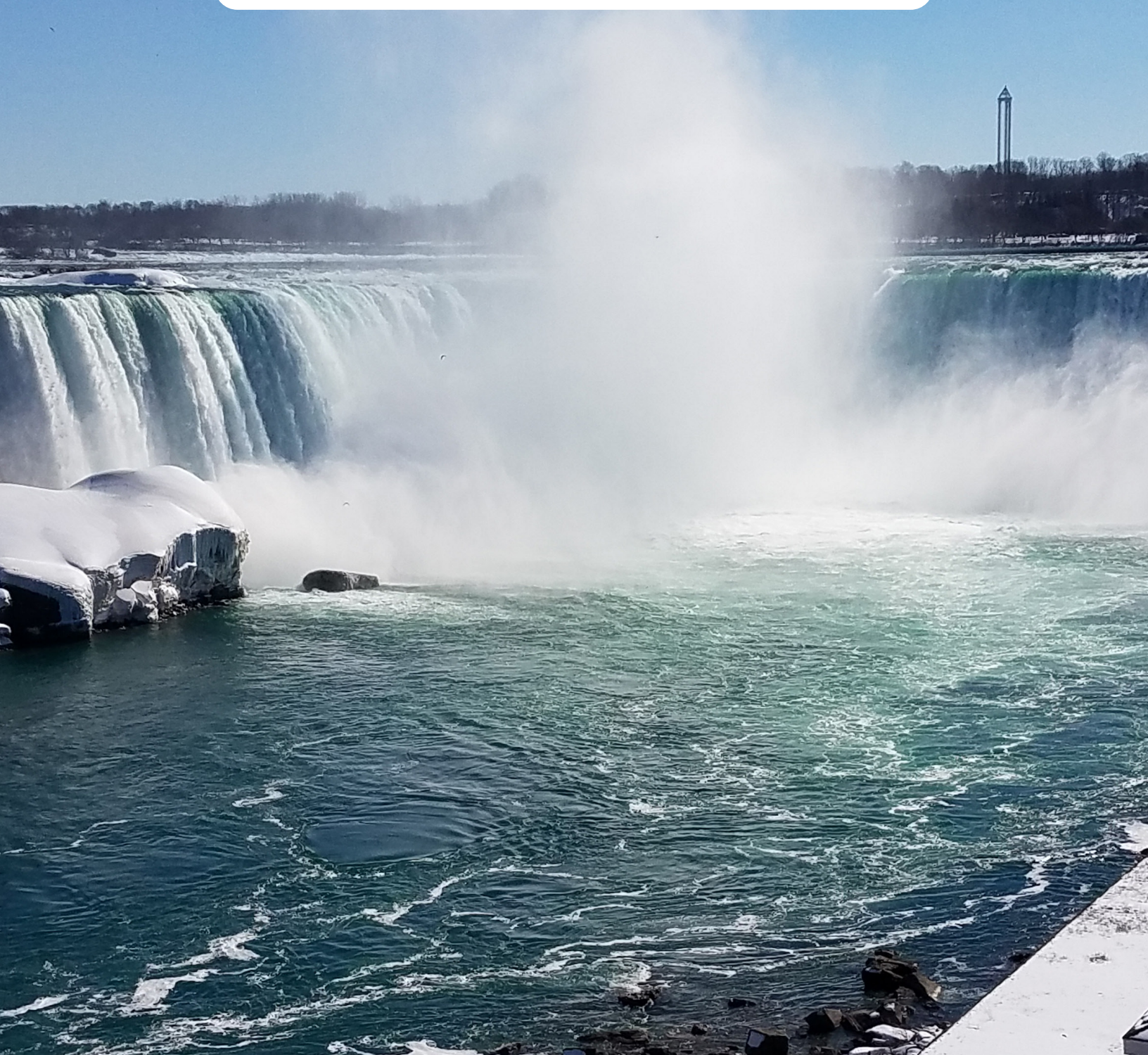


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Dear ATI ExChange Readers:

December 2022 marks the close of my first year and second issue editing the ExChange! I am excited and proud of the interest and momentum the ExChange is contributing to the dialogues in our community. In late summer and then again at the virtual ACGM in October, I offered workshops to introduce myself, the evolving process for submitting to the ExChange, as well as hear from you about your interests and hopes for writing and the ExChange. Those workshops were presented to be informative and invitational, and I continue to encourage all of you to submit work or be in communication with me on how I might support you. Additional to the workshops, I hosted the inaugural ExChange Writing Group in November. It was a small but nutritious gathering! I heard from so many of you who could not attend but were interested in the idea, that I am inspired to host another ExChange Writing Group in the new year. Stay tuned for days and times!

The workshops and Writing Group activities are meant to expose the emergent process of writing; they are a means whereby, as is the ExChange itself. I am recognizing other activities and relationships that the ExChange can initiate, offer, and help to cultivate for the ATI community. I am also, as always, happy to hear from you about ideas or proposals you have for the ExChange as a service for connecting the ATI membership. The ExChange is a benefit and an extension of ATI membership, and so it can be an endeavor toward conversations and topics that are relevant to the AT through your thoughtfulness and contributions.

In this issue you will find two book reviews! It is exciting to have new literature emerging about the Alexander Technique from different perspectives. Sarah Barker has reviewed the much-anticipated *Marjorie Barstow and the Alexander Technique: Critical Thinking in Performing Arts Pedagogy* by Amanda Cole. Having been mentored by Marj herself, Sarah offers insight and connection for Cole's history and analysis of the innovative teacher. Diane Hovenesian also reviewed the recently published *The Alexander Technique: Seeing with Fresh Eyes* by Gentian Rahtz. Diane gives us a clear description of what to expect from this work and points to a desire for more information in our field about Don Burton.

The diligence of members of the ATI working group Just Inclusion!, formerly named Racism and Diversity, is a feature of this issue. Sharyn West and Irene Schlump voice with delicate boldness the struggles, conflict, and potential paths forward through challenges and concerns of AT work from a Diversity/Equity/Inclusion/Belonging (DEIB) perspective. Their article is coupled with a woven conversation from many voices in the working group, over the course of a few months, on the topic of the NOW Congress in Berlin in August of 2022. The voices consider, lament, and offer personal insights on results of behavior at that event in relationship to the important work of dismantling racist and colonialist systems as well as creating safe spaces for people moving through trauma and tools for listening with purpose.

Also in this issue is a research article on thinking, connecting ideas from the perspectives of several philosophical schools. I contributed this article from research I have done in the past that I have been revisiting in conversations about AT as well as dance practice recently. I have situated the article

here in this issue of the ExChange to ensure that we continue to consider scholarship and voices from outside the field as important contributors to conversations we have about our work with ourselves, our students, and our communities beyond ATI. In my mind, the ideas presented in the article are voiced from individuals I have named and invited to a fictitious dinner party; they interact, conflict, conflate, and are filtered through my lens and experience as an Alexander Technique practitioner.

Lastly, the issue closes with a photographic collage of images from the first Alexander Technique International meeting thirty years ago! Jamie Culbertson kindly contributed photos and I solicited some comments from people in those pictures to create a birthday collage from the ExChange. Maybe you recognize someone from the photos or maybe the comments bring you hope for what may come for ATI in the next thirty years!

Onward,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julie A. Mulvihill". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'J'.

~julie

ATI ExChange Editor

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Revelations and Revolution

Marjorie Barstow and the Alexander Technique: Critical Thinking in Performing Arts Pedagogy

By Amanda Cole, Palgrave MacMillian publisher, 2022

Reviewed by Sarah Barker



Amanda Cole demonstrates that Marjorie Barstow's teaching of the Alexander Technique had myriad parallels with John Dewey's philosophical principles of education. Through this lens Cole reveals Marjorie Barstow's revolutionary reconstruction of Alexander Principles and vocabulary resulting in a most effective educational approach. According to Cole, Barstow's approach focused on "...process and encouraging the independent learning and experimentation of her students, while also constraining and guiding her students to keep thinking, moving and experimenting" (p. 43). If you teach in the Barstow tradition you will recognize these values that may contrast with other pedagogical approaches to teaching Alexander's work.

In Cole's words this book is for "...anyone who has reached a certain level of expertise and skill in a particular area and wonders why increased effort and commitment do not necessarily translate into further improvement" (p. xx). This invaluable book gives Alexander Technique teachers a solid platform to stand on if we wish to continue the revolution in teaching the Alexander Technique begun by Marjorie Barstow. Surely to be controversial in the Alexander Technique community at large, Cole's work gives us the intellectual ammunition we need to engage in the debate over what will be the best approach to teaching this work. On the one hand we have a focus on form: inhibiting and using Mr. Alexander's procedures as he taught them. On the other, Barstow's work emphasizes teaching the process underlying Mr. Alexander's discovery. The emphasis there is on the student's observation and awareness, with the



teacher guiding the student in discovering how to control the poise of the head and general coordination.

Amanda Cole has given a carefully constructed history and discussion of Marjorie Barstow's work with F. M. Alexander's discoveries. She demonstrates that Ms. Barstow was a successful innovator of a pedagogy of the Alexander Technique and a precise and thoughtful teacher, true to Alexander's principles. Cole discusses the power and benefits of group teaching and the effectiveness of including students of many levels of progress: teacher trainees, beginners, and everything in between.

Amanda Cole brings several areas of expertise to this project. She is an award-winning Australian performer, researcher/writer and music educator. Currently a Research Fellow at Griffith University with a doctorate in performing arts, she is a performance coach. Much of her work draws on the extensive study she has done in the Alexander Technique with teachers of the standard approach (form and procedures) then with teachers focusing on observation, awareness and process (Marjorie Barstow trained teachers). Cole is particularly qualified to assess the effectiveness of Barstow's pedagogical developments. And we can see why that approach with emphasis on moving and directing in activity is so effective with performing artists.

Cole uses sound data collection and provides unquestionable accuracy in her history of Ms. Barstow's development of the AT. Sources include literature from other teachers FM Alexander trained, writings of John Dewey regarding education and the Alexander Technique, and, most exciting, an analysis of thirty years of correspondence in letters, principally between Marjorie Barstow and Frank Pierce Jones. Cole compares and contrasts teaching approaches of F. M. Alexander, A.R. Alexander, Marjorie Barstow and Frank Pierce Jones to provide the reader with a clear understanding of Marjorie Barstow's development of effective ways to teach Mr. Alexander's discovery. The reader can also come to understand the various pedagogical approaches we might encounter throughout the Alexander Technique community.

She draws on Ms. Barstow's students' first-person narratives, journals, and interviews. These include teachers principally trained by Marjorie Barstow as well as other established teachers trained in other traditions who found Ms. Barstow's work enlightening. In this way Cole's interpretation of Marjorie Barstow's pedagogy of the psychophysical use of the self has multiple perspectives beyond her own. All in this group express a predominating attitude that we must continue investigation into Mr. Alexander's discovery, and how to teach the attitude and approach to human activity he developed.

As scholarly work, this book provides an extensive and instructive bibliography. This is certain to be a source for future discussions and debates about the Technique. Cole also briefly describes the careers of those trained to teach by Marjorie Barstow. These biographical notes give a professional and historical context for the extensive quotes she uses from this community.

In Part II central concepts including primary control, inhibition, direction and directions, positions of mechanical advantage and sensory re-education are thoroughly investigated. Our understanding of the Alexander work deepens as we read. Cole draws parallels in detail between what Dewey did in educational philosophy and what Barstow did in Alexander Technique pedagogy. She explains how Barstow developed "The Application Approach" coming to rely on process, thinking and movement (thinking in activity). This included a very helpful mention of the difference between the concept of Alexander's "endgaining" compared to Dewey's "end in view". It gave this reader insight into the source of a favored phrase in Alexander directions in the Barstow pedagogy, "I move my head forward and up (or



away)...so that I can...”.

In order to present her thesis clearly, Cole has created some new distinctions worth exploring further. They are represented by chapters with intriguing titles including *Desire, Application and Art, and Democracy and the Social Context*. Within them she is able to further distinguish Marjorie Barstow’s well-educated approach to teaching. Barstow believed that “Everyone can practice”, with emphasis on observation skills, constructive thinking and supporting student independence as central to learning. According to Cole, Marjorie Barstow did not accept the premise that people could not possibly understand Mr. Alexander’s work. To that end Barstow continually refined her communication for clarity and understanding throughout her life of teaching. She applied AT to any and all activities in a manner that heightened creativity and a new consciousness. She emphasized the student’s responsibility in the learning process.

This book tells the story of a woman, an athlete, dancer and performer, quarter horse rancher, banker, who was a leader in her university years and an important member of the Lincoln, Nebraska community. We have benefitted from her lifetime dedication to the development of this revolutionary approach to human behavior.



Photos by Kevin Ruddell

Sarah Barker, Professor Emerita at USC, teaches techniques for connecting body and mind. She teaches Alexander Technique and trains Alexander Technique teachers throughout the US, in Europe and Japan. She published the first instructional book on AT in 1978, produced an educational video, *Moving with Ease*, and recently launched her wellness app *Allez-Up!*. She is an actress and coaches others in physical performance and wellbeing in Columbia, SC. She began her teacher training with Marjorie Barstow in 1972 and counts Ms. Barstow as one of her most important mentors in life.



From NOW onwards a Table is not enough!

by Sharyn West and Irene Schlump

This piece will trace how a working group in Alexander Technique International (ATI) was supported and able to increase engagement with Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB) across the organisation. It will show how the committed actions have ensured that some of its members be engaged in work that further embeds commitment to issues of DEIB into the next International Alexander Technique Congress. It looks back in order to provide perspective and context, it looks forward to seeing developments that mature further from early iterations around the value of immediate mediations and skilled interventions that rely on deep and active listening, practiced as a particular art of Alexander Technique in practice. Indicative conversations that have taken place have been put together to speak for and about the work of *Just Inclusion!*, a working group in ATI.

The working group was formed at the ATI Annual Conference and General Meeting (ACGM) in 2019 in Ireland because of a growing need from membership. The start-up task was to write a statement disclaiming *white* supremacist and racist views found in some of the writings of F.M. Alexander. In the course of this work, the group found a readiness to keep working together to deepen understanding and engagement with issues of social justice and to grow the working group membership. The working group took responsibility for raising awareness of diversity and equity issues and set out to engage ATI as a whole organisation. The group decided to stay a working group after finishing their task, rather than becoming a standing committee with an hierarchical order per organizational guidelines. As well as providing support for its own membership and each other's development, these volunteers undertake committee work throughout ATI. By placing relevant, recommended links to readings this outreach now extends to regularly publishing material on the public [ATI website](#).

The group has recently changed its name to *Just Inclusion!*, a working group of ATI. It now has a well-earned place within the organisational life of ATI, the community life of all ATI membership and the public it reaches via its website. Several members of the working group went as attendees to the Congress in Berlin 2022. Some gather also in an inter-organisation activist group - Alexander Technique Liberation Project ([ATLP](#)). All attended Congress with the foretold intention to provide a presence and offer resources to inform, educate and raise awareness of DEIB. The Congress organisers welcomed this as a benefit for the wider population of an Alexander Technique (AT) world that had waited for five years to be reconvening in person at an International Alexander Technique Congress. All this was unprecedented.

The skills the Volunteer Organising Team (VOT) from ATLP had been accessing, practising and developing in the preceding years stood everyone, including themselves, in good stead when they found they were offering, and providing, a necessary support service for attendees who became hurt and harmed in several situations that arose. An event on the opening day of the ATI ACGM, refers to these circumstances. This has been acknowledged; indeed it has led to being invited to contribute to giving input about ways to raise, address, prevent and remedy such issues having unwanted outcomes at the next International Congress to be held in Dublin in 2025.

Since the first Congress in Stoneybrook New York in 1986 there have been eleven more congresses. We know from Michael Frederick's account that a sadness about the poor, sometimes openly hostile, communication and lack of respect between the senior, first generation teachers motivated him. He envisioned promoting his understanding of a coherence in principle despite apparent differences arising from the various training backgrounds and he became committed to making this happen. He set about drawing on his extensive contacts, colleagues, and friendships across the AT community to organise



an event where practitioners could witness the reality of each other's approaches. There is an abiding conviction that underpins Congress - it can be shown that the same principles are present in varying approaches to teaching AT. And so, every three years or thereabouts, Congresses express this commitment by occasioning get-togethers that allow and encourage presumptions to be tested in experience and explored in debate. Typically, there are three years between congresses but that has been somewhat flexible. For Congress 2004, which was held in Oxford, there was a five-year gap so as to coincide with the anniversary of F.M. Alexander arriving in London and to be as close as possible to the esteemed Elisabeth Walker for her 90th birthday. Its theme was *Exploring the Principles*. The directors of the Congress introduced a written "Spirit of the Congress" statement, articulating the expectation of respectful dialogue and exchange between participants.

Before the Berlin 2022 Congress, Alexander Technique Congress Association or Congress Board (ATCA) introduced a "Harassment and Bullying" protocol for formal complaints to be received and addressed. Anyone interested in the history of Congress can read the statement of intent on the public website and also hear and think about it at the opening event of the Congress. Unfortunately, the protocol is not easily located.

Over these 40 years, Alexander work has grown and developed. The Congresses have been held in different countries and organised by different directors, who are selected before the end of each Congress and announced at the closing ceremony. They become responsible for organising the next Congress in liaison with the ATCA board. Congresses have become events hosting up to 800 people, inviting contributions from all teachers of AT and hosting plenary lectures from various other professionals whose work is seen to be relevant to deepen understanding. This recurring event is not the work of a professional body, nor is it aligned with a particular approach to learning and teaching.

In the years between the Chicago Congress (2018) and the Berlin Congress (2022) the whole world was subjected to unprecedented change arising between a natural occurrence and a shift in the role of communication technology. This can be tracked and traced into the story of developments in AT work. During the Chicago Congress an unpleasant conflict was brewing that surfaced around the use of online teaching and unavoidably became coupled with departures from the full time/time-served training model. At an evening panel scheduled to explore how the individual and the community at large envision the future of the AT, expression of differences became charged and openly polarised between those who advocated against departure from received models and training processes and those willing and able to proceed with on-line and hands-off ways of working. ATI's annual Conference and General Meeting (ACGM) in Ennis/Ireland (2019) did not reflect, or import, this conflict. Indeed, a prescient invitation was extended in the keynote speech entitled *Embrace the digital age*. It might reasonably be deemed to be obvious, consistent with ATI's non-regulatory and open-minded character, plus its Internationalist identity and DEI urge, that the 2019 AGM had an event app. Participants could chat, instantly upload documents, access changes, and check the daily schedule. In 2020 ATI organised bravely and with full commitment the first virtual ACGM.

By the time proposed events for Berlin came around in 2022, the use of internet communication had become normalised by necessity. Immediately after the announcement of the next Congress destination had been revealed the newly appointed co-directors engaged the international community with a taster video of their vision. In the intervening years a regular flow of information was kept up to entice practitioners and cultivate a keen interest for the next Congress. Updates arrived to our inboxes



connecting us electronically, but individually, to their unfolding vision and developments they were making for the Congress being planned. After Covid, people who were eager to and could afford to get together in person and enjoy the opportunity to share their work would come together. For those who could not attend, and with 'teaching without touch' fully embraced, online access became an instrument of inclusivity. A selection of workshops, plenary sessions, and resources of the Berlin Congress have been digitalised. The question does arise: *Will the promise of these resources becoming collective-commons be realised, or will they generate self-interested conflict?*

In the world of the intersecting principles in AT practice, a significant shift was about to come, and the work was about to be compelled to scrutinise habits and mindsets. Working under a teacher's roof, hands-on or not, one-to one or in groups, the work through in-person instruction was cancelled for a period of time by varying states of political authority. Transformations were not inspired by conscience; neither reasoning nor empiricism nor organic development into paradigm shift happened. By the 11th of March 2020, with evidence of extremely rapid human-to-human transmission and severity of the illness, the World Health Organisation announced a global viral pandemic. Over the next 10 days, and subsequent weeks and months, much of the world was placed under lockdown.

In the intervening years between the Congress in Chicago (2018) and the Congress in Berlin (2022), the world had changed. At a time when the significance of a global pandemic was not yet fully understood, one major event unified the world: Darnella Frazier used her cellphone to screen the live, real time murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020. Her action of recording and streaming epitomises power of the digital age; Darnella's video evidenced who dies in the systemic violence of inequalities within developed societies. Across the world the Black Lives Matter movement unleashed reckonings on racist policing, stoking a growing self-awareness to anyone able to accept that it was privilege that divided those who were and were not taken by surprise. Alongside this, the pandemic persisted and further exposed systemic features of social injustice indicated in the divide between the global, developed North, and the underdeveloped, majority world South. These factors increased the stimulus to reflect on the "international" of *Alexander Technique International* and the ATI working group develops an official statement in which ATI takes responsibility for the continuance and perpetuation of systemic racism.

Since that first Congress (1986), conceptualised and convened by Michael Frederick to bring disparate authoritative voices about the AT together, the world has changed. For some of us it has not changed enough. Michael has spoken and written about his inspirations and connections that have linked these cycles of congresses, and, how the structures have grown to continue creating an event every three years or so where, as Michael sees it "routine maintenance work can take place."

The worldwide community of Alexander Technique practitioners gather, tables are set up, a variety of accommodation and provision adopts a suitable venue, spaces are adapted and allocated to a feast of working together. Tradition, innovation, adaptation, flexibility, and skill always show up ... and so too does inevitable resistance and dispute. Fundamental, persistent issues show up and cracks form where the light shines through. At Congress there is showcasing, promoting, increasingly robust marketing of products of work that commend particularised approaches. Interaction is simultaneously individualised and familiarised between professionals gathering to listen and share each other's contributions, and to celebrate widening connections around AT work.

A special readiness was present at the International Congress, themed *NOW Nurturing Our Work*, in Berlin in 2022. Space was allocated in the open for organising. The volunteer organising group from



ATLP introduced themselves to the directors and were invited to set up and staff a table in a central hall. They and other colleagues from a range of AT organisations and backgrounds, provided about 16 workshops, teatime conversations, panels and contributions to panels. These events were introducing directing and modelling specific aspects of Diversity|Equity|Inclusion|Belonging (DEIB) work. Importantly, these presenters used the means of their pedagogy to share and build experience of a central feature of this work whereby hierarchies are dismantled, listening becomes a priority and inequalities are allowed to be named. In addition to this presence in the programmed events for the Berlin NOW Congress, and by simply being visible and available, ATLP and connected individuals played an invaluable part in increasing awareness of how important DEIB issues are to members of the community. That itself marked a step not formerly taken that evidences the growing importance of DEIB work in AT communities. But 'the table' was makeshift and had to be flexible. Several instances of distress had to be dealt with, exposed in public space. ATLP managed and offered highly adaptable and skilled support with complete assurance. This in itself provides testament to their preparatory work and demonstrated a skillset worth advocating.

In early November 2021, ATI's plan for its 2022 Annual Conference and General Meeting (ACGM) when it had been scheduled to take place before the *NOW* Congress in Berlin, to celebrate ATI's 30th birthday. The working group on Racism and Diversity (now named *Just Inclusion!*) was asked by the Co-Chairs and the Board to facilitate a closely planned sequence of steps that would bring members together to a plenary, scheduled to precede the closing ceremony, to show how far developing our internationalist identity had brought us.

"ATI has renewed the energy around country groups. Many members from all over the world are getting involved in ATI. The board would like these different groups to share their experiences around diversity and the issues that come up in their respective countries. AND we are interested in having a facilitator come in to help guide a conversation into the wider topic of diversity/racism/inclusion."

Conversations within the working group had reached a different growing agreement that to gather and listen to each other's wishes and hopes might not need or want a facilitator for a plenary about the future of DEIB work in ATI. A post in Basecamp, the communication platform of ATI on November 15, 2021 expresses this succinctly:

I like where this is going. I LOVE the idea that we would be discovering among us what needs to happen next, rather than hosting another session where we're being told.

However, On November 17, 2021 a reminder about an earlier post arrived and greatly affected plans to gather for that. Working group volunteers who were also committee members were asked to direct their energy as follows :

[there are] four members ... who are part of the ATI Groups with whom we are in the beginning phase of establishing communication & collaboration [Germany, Japan, France and UK] ... motivate and guide ... [collect together] their experiences on equity, diversity, inclusion and belonging in relation to their personal, professional and ATI experiences..... in this way we can optimize the time & workload for your members and all included in this process.

By November 26, 2021 notification of a fully detail plan for ACGM was sent, conveying a brief to the working group. Attention turns to those projects in relation to ACGM 2022 and conversation about meeting up stops for a couple of months. On Feb 13, 2022 a post to Basecamp asks that we revisit the plenary conversation. There is an immediate response reporting back to the idea of collecting conversations from the various country/language based groups of ATI :



.. [I was able to convene] ... a series of 'facilitated' chats and discussions over a few meetings with variously gathered members of our (Johannesburg) community of practice. I have not done a round of what I suggested ... but ... what it seems is an amalgam of what I wanted to do (open conversation), and what the board had in mind (facilitated).

Interest is again immediate, and an on-line meeting is requested picking up the idea of beginning cycles/ series of "listening gatherings" earlier as preparation for the approaching plenary session. By March 3, 2022 the following invitation and doodle poll is posted :

Hello dear colleagues,

We write this invite to ask that we meet and share.

ATI formed 30 years ago to grow an international professional society that would embrace differences and replace regulation with an ethic of practice. Three decades have been dedicated to building organisational structures, procedures and processes that draw members together to express and explore all things of psycho-physical unity to share, reflect and develop how we conduct ourselves.

What we hold dear started with F.M. Alexander's defining insight: It must be something I'm doing. Please join us for a meeting where we get together and tell each other what we would wish for ATI's immediate future. Our immediate past has provided much cause for pause. Let's get together and each say what we would most wish to do in ATI."

In the run-up to the meeting, enquiries were made, misunderstanding and confusion was revealed and the invite was repeated, variously restated, becoming ever more distilled to convey the nature and purpose of the meeting. This one was well appreciated:

As we discuss this meeting, I realise that to make best use of this precious time to get together and hear from each other, I will need to think beforehand about what I will choose to share! I feel relieved that we are choosing not to have to make decisions or plans but just connect and hear from each other. Coming to the present, in the context of this working group, reflecting on the 30 years of ATI is what I want to be doing here next ...

The most convenient date for those who had shown the most interest in meeting was March 24, 2022. On the March 31, 2022 the following was posted:

Hello all,

Apologies for having left it a whole week before saying thanks to those from the working group, international committee, board and founder members. I think 15 of us gathered to share thoughts and wishes. We spent the hour mostly unhurriedly, in kind, company, listening and being listened to.

There was a flow and an openness in tone and content, unconditional appreciations were unspoken but shown. Nothing said conveyed unpleasantness. Frank and challenging views asked for better; suggested a better way through.

M suggested a way useful in another group to do the circle, B took a lead to send it around our screens. The

thing did itself willingly. The conveners had plans borrowed from speed dating for the actual plenary. These remained untested.

As the hour matured prior engagements beckoned to some who left before we had ended; but it felt as if they might have stayed awhile longer otherwise. ... Some time remained ... for a reflective feedback round. We didn't harvest that, we had decided to not record the meeting ... Here is a list of [those] words/short phrases:

..... idealistic, hopeful, resources place, hurting in a torn world, please take the baton, constructive advisory, English language weariness, expected behaviour, patience, open arms, open arms don't erase/ease pre-existing hurt, communication anxiety, ATI in Spanish America, stood beside the ATI to take a look ...

ATI's 30th anniversary was an occasion that would frame the plenary and invite this charge and motivation for members to renew a commitment to ATI and progressing AT work.

The form that should have been practiced till the upcoming birthday is as follows:

Set up:

Read the invitation. Restate the framework to be used to practise speaking reflectively:

- **Speak in present tense (e.g. Yesterday as I was reaching for my mug ...)**
- **Use descriptive language = free of analysis, judgement, comparison (I choose to watch the journey of my hand)**
- **Speak for yourself about yourself (My movement slows and I see the rise and fall of my breathing. I can see it as up and down movement, as well as movement away from me towards the mug. I find my sit bones and do that movement again.)**

This form develops description based in self noticing and using words that express embodied sense of self and/or experience of one's own state. There is one further guideline that helps to provide easy stimuli to be treated as opportunities to deploy inhibition of responses negative, positive or otherwise. You get to practice not expressing your reaction whether that is amusement, disgust, approval, disagreement, embarrassment, hate etc - you can see where this is going - the value of this practice cannot be underestimated for its relevance to real life, intense, high stimulus moments.

- **Inhibit expressing your response**

The intention in practising listening is to ensure that it becomes an end in itself and clearly distinct from and not instrumental to decision making, task identification, clarification, or completion. Its outcomes are not facilitated nor are they directed towards goals or outcomes. The value of listening is entirely intrinsic to the doing of it, and to the unique learning that arises for each participant. Practise is about having time with colleagues to articulate experience and be heard without judgement. The practice itself fosters qualities indirectly, and these can also feed into meetings and decision-making mechanisms at all levels of organisational structures. Growing ability and support for tough decision-making becomes a virtuous circle that can cultivate a highly desirable professional culture where reliability begets willingness that accommodates and dignifies conflict instead of side stepping or disregarding it.

When the ATI ACGM was postponed until October and delivered as an online event, the working group on Racism and Diversity (Just Inclusion!) retained their allocated slot on the programme and "invited activists in this group who [were] participating in other groups at Congress regarding social



justice/politics/inclusion and diversity activism (etc.) use a slot to report back to ACGM” (Basecamp). However, due to a sequence of distressing circumstances at the Congress in Berlin, the session at the ATI virtual ACGM was turned into an opportunity to pause together, to take time to a share, to process the shock, hurt, and anger, as well as how those circumstances came to be handled while attending and in the aftermath of the Congress. Using the momentum of the listening practise, being able to negotiate a session on the first day of the ATI Conference with the superb flexibility and supportive attitude of the Workshop Planning Committee, the session for the ATI virtual ACGM in October 2022 emerged. The working group is familiar with feeling free and safe and because we felt welcome to bring forth personal issues and needs, the session became a platform and conversation to both air grievances from previous experiences as well as engage in the listening practise as a learning experience organisationally. It became a gathering where participants were invited to come with the express purpose of listening to each other and to consider a proposal for a campaign that could turn distressing events into a significant node of growth.

The working group on Racism and Diversity (Just Inclusion!) session at the ATI ACGM would also provide a space to share reflections, so that hurts that have occurred during the congress may become visible - and to an even greater extent - tangible. A space in which we do not shy away from the challenge, but can practise listening to the pain of others, accept it as our own and strengthen each other to endure those pains, anger, and anxieties knowing that there will be other mistakes that will be made. The event title shifted to become:

From NOW onwards a table is not enough!

Reflections from the Congress, intentions for the future

The invitation for the session said:

This session offers everyone a space for reflection, for what still wants to be seen, what encourages and strengthens us, what still wants to be healed.

The interactive meeting asks the questions: What do we want to request/require for the next congress in Dublin 2025? What needs to be woven into the structure of an International Congress in advance? And what are our fears, beliefs, or feelings that might hold us back? What do we want to actively participate in? What principles can guide us in our co-creation? What are the conditions we want to create to make a safe, more inclusive, and less hierarchical atmosphere for AT to flourish?

The gathering is an opportunity to listen to others and to share reflections. Reflections that describe our own experience without analysis or judgement. Please speak for yourself, describing your experience or what you wish for. Everyone is welcome, whether you attended the NOW Congress or not.

We will be accompanied by the music of uKhoiKhoi (below for a taste). Sharyn West has received permission from Anelisa Stuurman (vocalist) and Lesedi Rudolph (Next Movement production). uKhoiKhoi's Castle reflects on “ ... building a world where there is peace, equality, freedom of expression, and people respect one another, their culture, pronouns, sexual orientation, gender and beliefs”.

Castle by uKhoiKhoi

Host: Irene Schlump, Working Group on Racism and Diversity



The title of the session meant to convey that positive and constructive engagement with the next Congress had begun and already succeeded in taking an important step at a fundamental level. Bringing community involvement into the planning process via networking, behind the scenes meetings, and exchanges between interested parties happened quickly and brought new energies together in an event that included founding members of ATI, ATCA members, ATI Board Directors, members of the working group and ATLP. Most importantly, all who attended came as participants and listened to the working group make a commitment to “work to get ATI behind an aim such as this” (Basecamp).

This was a major achievement in itself, but assurances were given and taken that the intervening years would look to accommodate what the campaign sought to negotiate for the next Congress: “accommodate and dignify conflict ...[provide]a safe, comfortable space ... allocated to .. provision for immediate mediation. I went further, saying that in addition, preparation include experienced mediators be invited from within the AT community - there are experienced non-violent communication (NVC) practitioners” (Basecamp). No Congress has yet dedicated time and accommodation for such a collective introspection. The session and subsequent conversations wonderfully showcased a skillset developed by practising a practise for self-knowing, for self-care, and for sharing reflections.

AT’s means whereby is protected from becoming a means to an end, or a mere tool for accepting the status quo when we are tasked to align our personal, public, and private lives, wherein we are working for our professional organisations as we navigate a world in which the personal is always also political. Here difference and inequality show up causing cracks. Combining Michael Fredericks’s motivation infused with the readiness presented in the aftermath of NOW 2022, particularly allocating time and attention in the interim years until the next Congress, we can grow consciousness and ability for more constructive listening. This will directly nurture further work needed for easing into internationalism in ways that the “inter” allows for more connectedness.

So, We Asked Everyone To Show Up As Participants ...

The From NOW onwards a table is not enough recording can be viewed [here](#).

I am **Sharyn West**, a post humanist with an environmental and social justice commitment. I deliberate on my behaviour so that these values are expressed through careful, joyous and constructive interaction within a web of intelligent life that I love. I use the Alexander Technique to practice reflective equilibrium in activities of daily living and give time to imagining how to enhance being sentient and non-violent. I explore fidelity, particularly with my partner and our dog. I believe that humans are invented by water as a means whereby it can transport itself with ease under gravity.

I am **Irene Schlump**, a 55-year-old cis gender, white person who is just beginning to sense what being white means. Growing up sheltered in a small village in Germany, I have had a sense of injustice and oppressive behavior from an early age and questioned it. I am fire. In the fire is tranquility; there is a quiet place of peace, kindness and necessity that gives me the ground to find pragmatic solutions if they serve to find equity for all and everything involved. I find it exciting to understand life as a whole and explore how leading and following live in the principle of integrity, simplicity and in the arts. The Alexander Technique is a driving tool in this.



... So, We Ask Everyone To Show Up As Participants A dialogue from Just Inclusion! A working group of ATI

Alexander Technique International supports a working group made up of international members that come together to discuss racism and diversity. This working group discusses what is known institutionally and organizationally as *Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging* (DEIB) related issues and scenarios. The Just Inclusion! group has met virtually as well as in person at the global AT Congress in August 2022, including in our discussions issues that may be systemic to the Alexander Technique and/or teaching in general for us all regardless of affiliation with ATI, STAT, or other professional organizations. In fact, part of our work has been in declaring our need as a global community to participate in the challenging task of recognizing and dismantling racist and exclusionary language, imaging, and methods in our work and in the history of our work.

The Just Inclusion! Group formerly known as the working group on Racism and Diversity through ATI has the following purpose:

- to uncover biases in Alexander Technique theory, language and practice
- to lead ATI in developing and enacting anti-racist policies that bring about a stronger, diverse and equitable community
- to provide training and opportunities for ATI to understand White privilege and systemic racism and the physical manifestation of Racial Trauma in People of Color

With this purpose guiding us, we established a forum at the ATI virtual conference that we named *From NOW Onwards: A Table is Not Enough!* The “NOW” in this title is in reference to the “Nurturing Our Work” theme of the recent global AT Congress hosted by the Alexander Technique Congress Association (ATCA) in Berlin in August 2022. This forum has been a motivating collection of thoughts, experiences, and processing of trauma in order to incite action, create dialogue, and sustain the goals above. In creating dialogue, this energetic community dug back through our written exchanges, conducted through email and the collaborative communication tool called Basecamp. We extrapolated a series of personal reflections and responses, particularly centered around the global AT Congress NOW event. The following is a weaving and a true exchange—a multivocal perspective that lays bare our sensitivities, challenges, and hopes for ATI and the broader AT community.

These are the words of some of the members of ATI’s Just Inclusion! working group:

Congress and ATI

It was during my early years of studying the Alexander Technique that my first teacher attended the first Congress. Her description, when I asked her about it was, “Those Alexander teachers are the most stiff-necked people I’ve met.” I was horrified! How could this be? While I wouldn’t say the same thing today, I do think we still need much practice in what we preach: our ability to change long-practiced responses, our ability to observe without judgement etc. What struck me this year was the difference between what I felt at the Congress and what I felt during the ATI plenary session that Irene so deftly led. The ATI event felt safe; the Congress -- not always. I felt there would be no judgement no matter what was shared at the ATI event. Creating that sensibility on Zoom is no small feat. It is interesting to consider what didn’t work well at the Congress and also to consider what went right in our ATI meeting.

Debi, USA, Boston



It was my first Congress, yes first time I could find the money and the time for it. Because of my participation in Alexander Technique Liberation Project (ATLP), I realize that I was lucky not to walk into the Congress space “alone.”

Because we, at ATLP, thought that DEI should be in the spotlight today, we repeatedly proposed things in the spaces we were told could be occupied. In the end, every time, an event came in the way and made it impossible. It is true that there were many workshops on the DEI theme during this Congress. Except that, the organization of the Congress relegated it to a corner. I don't feel like an activist; the idea of activism tends to push me away. I've been too exhausted with activism in my life. I am interested in finding ways to increase the space for listening and caring within our professional community. Giving ourselves time and listening so we can listen to others, listen to the world. This is what I teach more and more.

I wasn't able to do anything but cry about our community having such poor awareness about equity.....

Manuelle, France, Paris

My first Congress was in Oxford, England in 2004. I remember being very excited and being told that one of the main objectives of the Congress was to create an accepting and open space for all teachers of the Alexander Technique, regardless of lineage, or where you were trained. I was very naive at this time and went into the Congress believing that would be the spirit I would encounter. As I look back on it now, almost 20 years later, I realize how intimidated I was and I become uncharacteristically shy in moments when asked to work with other people. I was afraid that my training and my skills were going to be judged or looked down upon. And through all of the Congresses I have attended, I have avoided the Exchange Room due to this same feeling.

During this past Congress in Berlin, there was definitely the joy of seeing friends and colleagues again after all of the delays due to the pandemic. And I was excited to be a part of the Alexander Technique Liberation Project (ATLP), and to be a part of bringing some new perspectives to the international community. I offered two events related to diversity issues, the first being a 30 minute workshop entitled *ABC's of DEI*, co-presented with Belinda Mello, and a Tea Time which focused on a podcast from the series “Scene on Radio,” entitled “Seeing White.” During the Tea Time we listened to Episode #7 where the cohost, Chenjerai Kumanyika, asks host John Biewen: *How attached are you to the idea of being white?*

The *ABC's of DEI* workshop was well received. However, I must say that we only had about 4 people in attendance. The Tea Time, “Seeing White,” also had a small but mighty group. And the Tea Time ended up serving as a safe space for one of the Congress workers who had just experienced a conflict in the bookstore. This conflict exposed how much the Alexander Technique community has kept its head in the sand over the past 50 years concerning issues around Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. It was a coincidence that the Tea Time I offered was happening just as this experience.

The “Spirit of the Congress” is as follows:

In the spirit of the International Alexander Congresses, we value the many approaches to the learning and teaching of Alexander's work.

Registration for a Congress implies agreement to participate in this spirit of mutual respect, and agreement not to demean the person or work of other participants. All workshops and events are covered by the Congress fee, no exchange of money for private lessons is permitted on Congress premises.

We ask all those enrolling for their participation in fostering a supportive atmosphere where diversity is encouraged and respectful dialogue enjoyed.

To really keep the Spirit of the Congress as written above, two basic things need to happen. The first is that the Congress needs to have an onsite safe space, or grievance process that is set up to hear and see individuals who encounter conflicts, microaggressions, insults, etc. during the Congress. The second thing to ensure the above is that “The Spirit” cannot just be a slogan. It needs to be believed in, celebrated, enforced, and applied without hesitation or apology.

Jennifer, USA, Mississippi

I have been to many Congresses and taken many workshops. Often the teacher will present an idea, and then say “Pair up and ...” People look around, sometimes eagerly, sometimes with caution, but we all pair up.

The problem for me: we are not given a choice. There is no space for people who feel reluctant to “pair up” and work with someone, especially someone they have never met, or if they feel “less qualified.”

This happened twice at a workshop I attended at the Congress in August 2022. The first time I glanced to my left, met the eyes of another teacher and reluctantly paired up. The second time the presenter asked us to pair up, I grabbed my water bottle and headed for the door. I did need water, but I also did not want to “pair up.” I wanted to observe.

I believe that we need to make space for people who may not want to participate by “pairing up.” Observation is also participating, and observers gather information that people in the pair probably miss.

Catherine, USA, Seattle

Something clicked when I heard Irene speak metaphorically about the “cat’s table” in the ATI post-Congress meeting. The “children’s table” at my extended family gatherings came to mind. Wherever I was seated, the existence of that extra side table brought up many questions. What was the criteria for membership to the “grownups” table versus the “kids” table? Who decided? What was their priority? Whose sense of order and relationships was shaping all of our experiences? What was the “story” about our family in which each of us were expected to play our assigned role?

At this most recent Congress in Berlin, I led a workshop, co-led a mini-workshop and attended two other workshops that were intentionally designed to address DEIB (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging). At each of these workshops there was emotional resonance in the room – energy looking to come out in tears, shaking, laughter, sighs. I felt there was a deeply shared longing for recognition and for a safe place. I listened to people who felt they were tolerated, or their identity was tolerated, but were not central to the event. For example, the plenary presentation on hypermobility was one of the few where the assumption wasn’t that the average person receiving an AT lesson would be able-bodied, with a higher education background. There was one workshop addressing LGBTQ+ teachers and students, another on racism led by a person of color. But in the opening, closing, and other gatherings, direct attention was not placed on the diversity present or an intention to increase diversity.



Like it or not, there have been hurtful events at the past congresses. The goodwill of the directors is not enough when there isn't a clear way for further harm to be addressed. Members of the ATLP made themselves available to offer support and to draw attention to DEIB during the Congress. And other people significantly joined in, particularly from ATI.

In the year before the Congress, the ATLP met regularly to support the directors. We offered, and were invited, to provide supportive direction toward centering growth in the Alexander community through centering DEIB. This was intended to be embodied in the ethos as well as in the means whereby the meetings would be held. I was one of the people who helped to draft a statement of ethical conduct. I freely admit our first draft was a very dense, plodding thing, in need of editing. But it included acknowledgement of harm and commitment to directly welcoming people who have been marginalized to the table, including ways to provide more financial aid. This work was scrapped by Alexander Technique Congress Association (ATCA); they chose to go silent or very quiet, leaving people to work off of the implied openness of the Spirit statement. I've observed and listened to members of the ATCA board and the Congress directors. I believe in their sincerity and openness to prioritizing DEIB. I don't think any of us really know how to do this without help and resources. Time and money have not yet been allocated to DEIB. It seems it's not yet a priority in the story of the Congress.

I felt that the story we are asked to play a role in at the Congress is that of a thing called *The Alexander Technique*, while the people, their relationships, their innovations, the value of awareness and honesty were all secondary. I felt that preserving The Alexander Technique was the main event. The inability of the Congress directors and the board to stop showing the offensive, hurtful, and unethical film of people from the African continent is an example of ignoring impact, prioritizing some kind of idealization of The Alexander Technique.

I have observed the spirit statement being read but not embodied through constructive action. People of different training traditions and methodology are brought together with the idea of free exchange with the real preparation needed to act outside of habits of bias. I've seen that when someone demeans another person's work, nothing of consequence is done, no mediation or resolution for the person harmed is made available. I heard the reluctance of the ATCA board members to act quickly or publicly as a decision not to rush or end-gain. It looked more to me like an avoidance of responsibility. Without timely action and open acknowledgement, the community lost an opportunity to grow together. Truly there were wonderful interactions during the Congress. But by keeping issues quiet or saving them for later, many of us felt like we were at the "cat's table." As a member of the ATLP, I can say that more than one person from a marginalized identity or non-eurocentric culture, was discouraged enough to decide not to participate next time.

Belinda, USA, New York

Post Congress, on Basecamp

Aug 27

Irene I would like to thank you for a welcome and wonderful opportunity you created for me by your intervention during one of the sessions at Congress. One of the participants at a presentation where you raised questions and challenged the practise of using images of indigenous people resulted in me being drawn in. This led to a rich and welcome session for me with a trainee on our teacher training programme it is so important what you deconstructed.



Aug 29th

[I watched it online]... your critique that 'ethnographic' film can only safely and respectfully be appropriate - and not expropriating - if part of the reason for showing it has that purpose.

Dear All, I for one cannot be persuaded by anything in the whole world and its entire story that an AT workshop is a suitable context for an objective/subjective or any kind of illustrative gaze on the ethnicity of others. ... I would like to be heard in this group before going to ATLP. Please. I need to speak about ATI in South Africa and hear some thinking from others in this group. There was a conversation between some of us about reporting back after Congress before all this.

30th Aug.

Dear Irene, please keep me involved, I need a healing process. I also feel deeply harmed by this. That is why I thanked you.

I would like to speak as a South African. The session had a clear invitation to speak about oneself in relation to transformation enabled by finding AT. The offending images are from a process in someone's life where her transformation related the view she gained of a group of persons regarding THEIR humanity.

Dear everyone, I really need to talk this through within our ATI group. Please can we meet about this ...

Aug 30th

Hello All,

I do apologise for 2 e-mails you have received. I am a bit scattered by some recent events and posted them in response to e-mails from Basecamp. I deleted: I feel harmed to have been present, even on-line to the presentation that dealt in images of others. The people who were being plundered by [the presenter] for her transformation are my forebears. I was classified white by Apartheid.....It is complex, I too am in extreme pain, even to be in ATI sometimes.

Sharyn, South Africa, Johannesburg
Wales, Monmouth

This was my third consecutive participation in the International Congress. In fact, for many years the cost of the Congress kept me away. The ability to make a deposit really suited me and, of course, the discount -once you attend, it's easier. This year I was especially enthusiastic because the Congress was in Germany! In Ireland, I had consistently avoided all plenary sessions and panels to avoid straining myself too much with the English language. In Chicago, I was annoyed how little consideration was given to non-native speakers and in Berlin, I was surprised and speechless that even here no precautions were taken to ensure that speakers at least lowered their speaking speed or that one did not feel stupid when asking for it as a participant. By the way: I love ATI's Language Flags!

All in all, I took a lot of time, and I really liked the open schedule, which allowed me to withdraw and chat with colleagues and exchange ideas.

However, although language barriers are a big issue for inclusion and equity, it was something else at this Congress that hurt me:

I was pretty much triggered by the showing of video material created 25 years ago, that showcased indigenous people in Namibia. And although I spoke to the filmmaker to make her aware that others



also find this unacceptable and hurtful, she again showed excerpts on the main stage. At this point, the directors of the Congress and ATCA were already informed. No reaction. And we who were sitting in the auditorium? I was paralyzed. I looked around, saw some of my colleagues and friends. I knew they felt as I did. I saw it. No one was able to stop the scenario. It was like a collective startle response.

It's a kind of being ready that I would like to learn. It seems to me to be valuable work that we collectively give ourselves permission to speak up at the next Congress when we witness something that seems an injustice. Practicing a listening practice can be a good thing, learning to express one's own conflicting feelings and to face a counterpart clearly and with an open heart.

Only on the way home, I realized that this session with the film was also streamed. I shared my horror at this with the working group on Racism and Diversity and the ATLP. My outcry allowed a colleague to share with me how the scenes shown had a direct and immediate impact on her. This made me realize what my "role" is. To be there, to listen, to be courageous and to represent myself with dignity. Without haste but swiftly, precise but not cutting, soft but not wobbling around.

In working on Systematic Racism, it is intrinsic to take collective acknowledgement for (it seems) individual "sensitivities." With radical compassion.

I also owe this radical compassion to those who gathered in the ATLP, supported and educated each other and spent more than two years preparing for the Congress, shaping the Congress in collaboration with Rossella Buono and Andreas Dirscherl, the directors of this years congress- regardless of whether they are also connected in the ATI working group on Racism and Diversity, belong to another organization, or do not belong to any organization at all.

ATCA is a young organization. Michael Frederick, as one of the directors of the Congress 2025 in Dublin, has been at the ATI Conference and the From NOW Onwards a Table is Not Enough! session. The campaign has achieved a lot by establishing a relationship to Congress, possibly already having established the dialogue we imagined could prove difficult or unwanted.

I am with joy in conversation and I rely on the promise that ATCA has committed themselves to develop guidelines visible to all, to develop a procedure that also deals with microaggressions and violations of the Congress Spirit in a competent and immediate way and that listening practices will be installed. The very fact that we are talking about DEI and Belonging leaves me awake and ready to participate in the next Congress.

Irene, Germany, Bochum

I was not at the Congress ... but here on-line I am hearing us collect more ideas about what would make a Congress a safer place and put the 'cat's table' in a different place. No Congress has yet been dedicated to such a collective introspection.

Lucia, South Africa, Johannesburg;
Wales, Monmouth

Just Inclusion! A Working Group of ATI
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The Alexander Technique: Seeing with Fresh Eyes A Personal Perspective

By Gentian Rahtz, self-published, 2022

Reviewed by Diane Hovenesian

Gentian Rahtz had her life changing moment in 1985. She was attending an introductory workshop on the Alexander Technique taught by Don Burton who had recently opened the Fellside Alexander School in Kendal, UK. After some hands-on work with Burton, she went to a café at lunchtime. It was there that she experienced a way of being that tapped an inner stillness and awareness of her three dimensionality. She writes:

This was my first experience of the power of Alexander touch. It did not feel imposed upon me – almost the opposite – as if Don had made himself porous, or transparent, so little did he try to correct me in any way. His hands ‘listened’ to my system in a way that awakened some awareness of an innate intelligence in the tissues of my body that had not been heard in that way before. (p. 3)

Not long after this weekend, Gentian Rahtz joined Burton’s three-year teacher training at Fellside and graduated in 1990. She later studied and became a Cranial Sacral therapist. *Seeing with Fresh Eyes* is her musings on thirty years of practice and teaching. It is intended for readers who are already familiar with the Alexander Technique.

She begins with a brief history of FM and the historical influences that shaped him and his discoveries. She then touches upon topics integral to the work – primary freedom (her preference over using primary control), inhibition, directions, expanded awareness, the benefits of semi-supine, to name a few. Rahtz supplements her prose with some quotes from Burton, other Alexander teachers, literature, and different modalities as a complement to Alexander’s own writings. Rahtz weaves these resources together in a way that presents her perspective on the value of the Technique. In this way, her book title serves as a call for readers to revisit their own journeys with rediscovering “the natural good use” of themselves.

For those who desire more depth into one aspect of the Alexander world, *Seeing with Fresh Eyes* is only an appetizer. Since Alexander teachers train in different ways depending on what school they attend, *Seeing with Fresh Eyes* made me want to learn more about Don Burton and how he taught the Technique.

Diane Hovenesian is an ATI Certified Alexander Technique Teacher in the greater Boston (USA) area who owns Healing Well Studio (healingwellstudio.com). She is a staff member in the Health and Wellness Center at Berklee College of Music teaching AT to performing artists.



Let's Dance: Intersections and Connections about Thinking

By Julie Mulvihill, PhD

This essay is the result of thinking about thinking. In it, I weave together the ideas from the cognitive linguists George Lackoff and Mark Johnson, Alva Noë who is a leading expert on embodied cognition, Richard Shusterman and his notion of somaesthetics, as well as my understanding of the philosophy of the Alexander Technique from the writings of F.M. Alexander and my own practice. I imaged these individuals sitting at a dinner party with me facilitating the conversation, cracking the occasional joke, and breaking up fights. I rely heavily on the voices of the included dinner party guests, so that you can make your own connections to what interests you from their ideas, your practice of Alexander Technique, and your own thinking about thinking. My hope, many years ago in writing the original essay, which is more extensive than this excerpt I am presenting, was to explore intersections and connections of ideas about thinking in relationship to the AT principals, as I was understanding them at that time. In this iteration of the research, I am stepping back to simply notice the remarkable way the practice of the AT truly embodies theory, how thinking and doing really are the same, simultaneous.

Undergirding the pretenses of conscious thought and reasoning, operations are set up and systems put in place that help people have explicit thought and perceptive experiences. Cognitive linguists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson describe these operations and systems: “All of our knowledge and beliefs are framed in terms of a conceptual system that resides mostly in the cognitive unconscious” (“Flesh” 13). The cognitive unconscious consists of the abstract conceptualizations that a mind develops through experiences, which in turn are shaped into metaphors as they are re-projected on the physical world. The cognitive unconscious produces meaning for the abstract conceptualizations of the mind that manifests in experiential reality.

The cognitive unconscious undergirds experience and helps us process that of which we can be aware. Alva Noë aptly gives the example, “You don’t need to locate your hands before you put them to use reaching for something, and as a general rule you don’t need to pay attention to your body parts (hands, fingers, whatever) in order to use them effectively” (“Brain” 77). Our unconscious cognitive abilities keep us from being mired in the minutiae of the innumerable process that our existence requires. “Psychologists use the term “body schema” to refer to the implicit, practical body plan that enables us to deploy our bodies effectively in movement and action” writes Noë (“Brain” 77). The “implicit” nature of a body schema is the job of the cognitive unconscious and is inherently correlated with experience and therefore movement.

Johnson acknowledges, “Movement is one of the conditions for our sense of what our world is like and who we are. A great deal of our perceptual knowledge comes from movement, both our bodily motions and our interactions with moving objects” (“Meaning” 19). Movement is both implicit and explicit and so the body schema is an important feature of our cognitive functioning. Noë writes, “to have a normal, well-functioning body schema, then, is for one to have habits of bodily activity; it is for one to have a body ready in the background to serve one’s engaged activities” (“Brain” 77). But the terms “habits” as Noë conceives of it does not coincide with Johnson’s concept of reliance upon the cognitive unconscious, nor with the terminology involved in F.M Alexander’s methods.

Noë considers habits to be necessary. He explains “you need habits of thought and behavior in order to be decisive and deliberate, for habit is the foundation of skill” (“Brain” 119). Furthermore, Noë contends that habits are “expressions of intelligence and understanding that allow us to navigate



the world as familiar” (119). Without habits, the world would forever be new, unfamiliar, and alien; no strategies would be tested and reliable for responding to experiences and interacting with the world around us. So, for Noë, “It would be incomprehensible if our acquaintance with objects and our development of expert powers of perceptual discrimination—with faces but also with words, letters, cars, birds, paintings, etc—did not incorporate changes in our nervous system” (“Brain” 117). Habits and their use change meaning and our relationship with the world.

Habits, for Noë, are responses to the world. They are skills and strategies on which all people depend to think and behave. Noë relates the way that habits change perceptions through the example of improvisational jazz music. He writes,

Every performance is unlike any other yet the novelty and variation, the improvising, take place according to more or less explicitly agreed-upon rules. What is extraordinary about a good solo is that it manages to make a statement and do something surprising within a highly predictable and conventionalized scheme. (“Brain” 124)

The habit is what creates meaning within a jazz solo or any other situation that is surprising while still maintaining structure. Habits in this sense aid a person in navigating her world, adjusting the world and herself as experience unfolds.

For F.M. Alexander habit and habituation are inclined in two ways. The first way is regarding faults in the thinking and carriage of the self. Alexander and AT practitioners often refer to “habit” as an instinctual reaction that had been ingrained into behavior through debauched kinesthesia. In the world of Alexander, a student becomes more efficient as consciousness is raised about habits that misuse the body because of a distortion in the body schema. Learning about habitual thinking and how those thoughts can change behavior allows practitioners to learn to move with more freedom and ease. Michael Gelb declares, “Alexander found that habitual misuse adversely affected the reliability of his kinesthetic sense and that, most startling of all, his feelings of ‘rightness in action’ was untrustworthy” (52). To put it plainly, a habit may prevent a person from doing what she things she is doing.

Indeed, a person may think she is choosing and navigating through a healthy physical path, but her debauched kinesthesia had tricked her consciousness. Alexander writes, “man on the subconscious plane now relies too much upon a debauched sense of feeling or of a sense-appreciation for the guidance of his psycho-physical mechanism, and...he is gradually becoming more and more overbalanced emotionally with very harmful and far-reaching results (“Inheritance” 89). Habits can prevent people from functioning in ways that promote holistic wellness.

The second way that Alexander refers to habit includes the idea of “Use” and developing an efficient sense of the self that offers a student an experience of her whole body functioning with ease. Alexander writes,

The primary requirement in dealing with all specific symptoms is to prevent the misdirection which leads to wrong use and functioning, and to establish in its place a new and satisfactory direction as a means of bringing about an improvement in use and functioning through the organism. (“Use” 54).

Like Noë, Alexander contends that habits in the sense of use is plastic and interdependent on other



functions. Frank Pierce Jones comments that Alexander and John Dewey in their theorizing together recognized the cultural implications of use. Jones writes, “Habits, though learned rather than innate, involve a relation between an organism and an environment and cannot be understood by looking at the organism alone” (100). Through a system of re-education, a person can learn good use of her self, overcoming habits of poor physical use and rejuvenating consciousness about her choices and behaviors. Richard Shusterman reflects that Alexander advocates positive habits that are functioning below the level of explicit consciousness and “the essence of such positive habits is their always remaining accessible for consciousness to monitor and revise” (204). These revisions of course, are the re-education of our thinking in relation to our ever-changing environments.

Alexander’s principles allow a person to become more aware of her own choices and actions as well as more aware of her environment. In seeking to recognize habit and adapt that habit accordingly to a constantly refreshing body schema, new awareness is possible for personal and situational use. Noë discusses perception in several different ways that are relevant to how sensory awareness is conceived for thinking. He writes, “The process of perceiving, of finding out how things are, is a process of meeting the world; it is an activity of skillful exploration” (“Perception” 164). The “skillful exploration” is an action that constitutes creation and production simultaneously. Perception, for Noë, is an interaction between us and the world around us. Through sensorimotor knowledge, experiences instantly become perceptual content and a person can make choices for an action based on these concepts. Sensorimotor knowledge includes “the abilities to move and point and the dispositions to respond by turning and ducking and the like” (“Perception” 90). For Noë, sensorimotor knowledge enables the visual content of experience. The visual experience is of particular importance for Noë in that he supposes that people consciously construct many perceptual metaphors through a visual experience, even when they are blind.

Lackoff and Johnson contend that our consciousness and ability to reason has biologically developed through our sensorimotor possibilities. They write,

Philosophically, the embodiment of reason via the sensorimotor system is of great important. It is a crucial part of the explanation of why it is possible for our concepts to fit so well with the way we function in the world. They fit so well because they have evolved from our sensorimotor systems, which have in turn evolved to allow us to function well in our physical environment. (“Flesh” 43)

Sensorimotor systems are important, as Lackoff and Johnson make clear, for the development of thinking. Furthermore, the coupling of personal somatic awareness with awareness of the world supports the reciprocity of sensorimotor functions for perceptual understanding.

Pragmatist philosopher and explorer of somaesthetics, Richard Shusterman, in building the philosophical notions of somaesthetics, puts forth that people can develop a somatic self-consciousness reflection. Attuning the feelings and actions of the body with reflection in order to understand and improve oneself is one nature of somaesthetics. Shusterman writes, “Such improved self-use, I should reiterate, is not confined to mere practical, functional matters but includes improving our capacities for pleasure, which can be significantly enhanced by more perceptive self-awareness of our somatic experience” (6). The Alexander Technique has a similar undertaking in cultivating an improved sense of self-awareness through sensorimotor experiencing, the inhibition of bad habits, and the direction of good ones.

While Shusterman does not quite recount Alexander’s notion of primary control as I conceive



of it, nevertheless his idea of reflective self-improvement enacted through the sense and sensorimotor functions help to construct the idea of a thinking body in alignment with the Alexander Technique. He writes that reflective self-consciousness “is important for learning new skills and necessary for properly identifying, analyzing, and rectifying our problematic bodily habits so as to render them more appropriate to our changing conditions, tools, and tasks, and more in harmony with the changing needs and health of our basic bodily instrument” (Shusterman 13). While I dislike thinking of body as instrument, it is fair to point out that like Alexander, Shusterman advocates a melioristic view of somatic engagement that gives insight into how we think.

An historic view in western cultures has been to separate a thinking and superior mind from a carnal and instinctive body. The thinkers referenced in this essay, by contrast, are weaving together a view that contests that separation and puts forth a notion of a metaphysical mind influenced and empowered by a thinking body, and vice versa. As I see it, there is no “mind” or “body” as separately inhabited spheres. Noë writes of facial expressions, “They are not so much evidence of what is going on within us as they are, in fact, enactments of our condition” (“Brain” 15). Beyond facial expressions, our engagement in the world is a reciprocal enactment of our perceptual consciousness. Our bodies and our minds are simultaneous. Continuing with this simultaneity, Noë contends that consciousness and experience are roughly synonymous. He writes, “I think of experience, broadly, as encompassing thinking, feeling, and the fact that a world ‘shows up’ for us in perception” (“Brain” 8). The convergence of consciousness, experience, and perception shows the intertwining nature of body and mind. Remembering Alexander’s debauched kinesthesia provides a sense of how perceptions may disagree with physical use or experience. Alexander offers inhibition as a way of dealing with the disparity.

For Alexander, the misuse and disease within a person is caused by interferences in the reflexive working patterns that are evolutionary to humans. By inhibiting the interferences that keep us from feeling our bodies, movement and functioning becomes expansive, light, and full. While “inhibit” sounds like a negation of a functioning, it is actually the freeing of the physical dispositions that are natural. Inhibition allows individuals to develop a keener and more complex sensorimotor functioning thereby enhancing perception and experience. Regarding somaesthetics Shusterman writes,

If reflective somaesthetic consciousness is essential for understanding and correcting habits and thus improving self-use, then inhibition proves an equally crucial tool for such reform, since we need to inhibit the problematic habits in order to provide the opportunity to analyze and transform them into better ones. (196)

Thus for Shusterman, as well as for Alexander, inhibition can enable an individual to release unnecessary tension and defenses that prohibit her from refining knowledge and directing thinking processes.

The simultaneous effect of inhibiting the interferences that keep a person from physical efficiency while directing awareness through primary control and sensorimotor function reflects thinking and an interaction with the environment. Lackoff and Johnson contend that neural connections fall into several different models. Neural models help people to perceive spatial concepts as well as choose and enact appropriate motor concepts. The models “show that neural structures that can carry our sensorimotor functions in the brain can in principle do both jobs at once—the job of perception or motor control, on the one hand, and the job of conceptualizing, categorizing, and reasoning, on the other” (“Flesh” 38).

As an individual interacts with the environment perception shifts and directing energies within the



body also shift. Considering the body schema that is active in the unconscious, Noë brings up the use of tools. Tools can be physical proprioceptive instruments as well as thinking strategies that are conceptual. Noë writes, “Parts of me—tools—can be spatially discontinuous with me: What makes them me, what makes them part of my body, is the way my actions take them up. And insofar as I act in and feel with my extended body, my mind is extended too” (“Brain” 80). The way in which the mind is extended is through the extension of the body.

For me one of the hopes and drivers of practicing the Alexander Technique is the potential to inhabit the learning philosophy implicitly and come to rely on my cognitive unconscious to continue healthy functioning and interactions. Alexander writes,

When each stage of the series essential to the “means whereby” is correctly apprehended by the conscious mind of the subject, the old habits can be broken up, and every muscular action can be consciously directed until the new and correct guiding sensations have established the new proper habits which in their turn become subconscious, but on a more highly evolved plane. (“Inheritance” 189)

This “more highly evolved plane” refers to one’s naturally efficient functions. Alexander believed that human potential is much greater than individuals generally enact, and that culture, technology, and fear keep people from fulfilling their evolutionary capabilities. Perhaps a “more highly evolved plane” is also possible for our relationships and culture, given the embeddedness of our use within our ever-changing environments and the deep dependence we have on social conditions. A person’s relationship with her environment informs how she is able to think because the environment dictates, in some sense, how she is able to move. If this be the case, let’s dance.

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1992 ATI Annual Conference and General Meeting Photo Collage

Photos submitted by Jamee Culbertson



“When we started ATI, it was a vision more than anything else. We had a vision of richness in AT that was unfulfilled, a vision of diversity in teaching methods and approaches that were unrecognized, and a vision of a world-wide organization dedicated to growing AT. At our first meeting, we had only one non-American member (thanks, Eckart). I sat in on a committee meeting the other day and there were 3 attendees from Asia, one from Europe, and 3 from the USA and it was just remarkable to see that we’ve gotten here.

I’ve learned a lot from being in ATI. I’m always interested in checking out what everyone is up to at our annual conferences and spending time just hanging around when I can get there in person. I really appreciate the openhearted spirit that has developed over the years and look forward to seeing where it leads us.



When I was training to be a teacher, most courses in the world were run by men even though women were the majority of the students. I'm just so glad that this is no longer the case and that the influence of women both in our organization and our trainers and guides has increased over the years.

For all of this and more, I am grateful."

--Bob Lada

"When I was participating in the formation of ATI, it was just an idea--an idea for a new organization of people interested in the Alexander Technique, studying the Alexander Technique and training to teach the Alexander Technique. We came from many places and backgrounds and were connected by our common passion for the work. We really didn't know what would happen and how it would all work! Now, here we are, 30 years later, a fixture in the Alexander world. We have made a difference in so many ways, and I know we will continue to do so. I am grateful to everyone who has been a part of this journey. Such special and deep friendships have been formed and cemented forever. Dream big. It can happen!"

--Debi Adams

"In that first ATI meeting, I suggested we needed a Vision/Mission Committee. What I believe was speaking to me was the care and honesty with which we were forming this new organization fueling a desire to preserve that spirit. I honestly didn't know exactly how it would function. Over time it has become the committee of the former chairs of ATI, which makes deep sense. Anyone who has been chair has cared for the organization and all of its members, through "thick and thin." Together we hold the history and can offer ideas to chairs, members, and the Board that come from our years of stewardship. I currently Chair this committee; and smile as I realize "this committee was my contribution" in that first meeting."

--Cathy Madden

"When I look back on the founding meeting of ATI, I realize how unusual it was.

We knew we wanted to create an organization where we would be welcome, and because many of us were not welcome in other Alexander Technique organizations, we wanted ATI to be open and inclusive, where anyone could be a member.

We also knew that we did not want to approve training programs. We didn't care where or how people learned to teach or how long they trained, only that they could demonstrate that they were competent to do so. Thirty years later, we have almost finished this task, and have a teacher evaluation system unlike any other in the world, one that is based on the quality of a person's teaching, not the quantity of their training.



One more reason ATI is unusual: We use Formal Consensus to make decisions.

Formal Consensus is a system that aligns beautifully with the principles of the Alexander Technique. It has helped us adopt proposals that include everyone's concerns and perspectives and helped us learn to listen. We are all the better for it. And one of my dreams for the rest of the Alexander Technique world is that they learn about it too."

--Catherine Kettrick

From left to right: Bob Lada, Debi Adams, and Tommy Thompson. ATI Annual Conference and General Meeting 1992 to 2022



ExChange: Call for Submissions

ExChange, the journal of Alexander Technique International, is calling for submissions of scholarly articles, book reviews, and creative essays.

The past nearly three years of experiences with a global pandemic have given us pause to consider our work: to reflect, reimagine, revel, and make revelations about ourselves as AT practitioners, teachers, and ambassadors. What are you learning about yourself? What are you learning about or from your work? What challenges, grounding, or buoyancy has AT provided as you move through our current world?

For publication in the Summer issue please submit by February 15. For publication in the Winter issue please submit by September 15. We are accepting rolling submissions.

Submission Requirements:

- Please organize your work in a Microsoft Word document and PDF
- Title your submission with your last name and an abbreviated title (include full title in the document itself)
- Photos included need to be in jpeg format
- Send your work as attachments to the email: exchange@alexandertechniqueinternational.org

Tips for Submission:

- Submissions should be less than 6,000 words (concessions can be made on a case-by-case basis)
- Some submissions may roll over to a later issue if they need more time for processing
- Submitting early is always welcome!
- Direct questions to Julie Mulvihill, Editor of the ExChange: exchange@alexandertechniqueinternational.org



ATI Membership Renewal Reminder

ATI membership renewal is currently open through March 31, 2023. Membership dues are being raised by 11% for 2023 per ATI's bylaws. If you pay before January 5th, 2023 you can renew at the 2022 rate. Please [click here](#) to see all UPDATED tiered member fees.

We invite you to update your member profile by filling out this form for our website: [ATI Renewal - Profile Update](#).

If you are experiencing financial hardship due to the pandemic, please contact the Membership Committee: membership@alexandertechniqueinternational.org by January 5th, 2023. The Membership Committee will not take discounted fee requests beyond January 5th, 2023.

ATI has enhanced its benefits over the last few years. New benefits include:

- Hosted ATI social hours, bi-monthly
- Business promotion, including opportunities to be promoted on ATI's new Instagram page, and the ATI teacher map directory listing which features your location.
- Access to ISMETA liability insurance for US/Canadian and European members
- Discounted ABMP Liability insurance for US Members
- Additional business and marketing training for teaching members beginning in 2023!

Teaching members, please update your teaching location for the Member Map Directory by December 15th, 2022.

If you'd like to hear more or would like to clarify the benefits of ATI Membership in English please contact Dana Calvey, Membership Chair, to schedule a 15 minute Zoom: membership@alexandertechniqueinternational.org

We hope to see you in the New Year at an ATI Zoom Social Hour, online on Social Media, or at Workshops and Events throughout the year.

Warmest wishes for a safe, healthy, and abundant 2023!

