

Expect the Unexpected
The F.M. Alexander Memorial Address, June 15, 2014
John A. Baron

Expecting the Unexpected

It is now 53 years since the first memorial lecture was held to celebrate the life and work of F.M. Alexander. Remembering his legacy gives us an opportunity to appraise his work in the context of our current world.

I'd like to talk about "expecting the unexpected" in the Alexander Technique. Even though this "unexpected" is not easily defined or readily accessed by traditional methods such as lectures, I'll hope to leave you with at least some "feeling sense" of what I mean by this.

I'm sure that all of us, at some time or another, have struggled just to define this work. Even when we find a standard definition that we can repeat verbatim say at a social event, it seems to lose its potency over time and we end up searching for another one to fill its place.

Personally I'm glad that we cannot easily define the Technique—because it's bigger than that!

But as we try to come up with a working definition, the word "life" seems to figure inside some of the better ones. As in:

"A skill for Life."

"Life just got easier."

"The universal constant in living."

"Life is not an emergency."

"Poise for Life."

What is this that makes our work come alive? How is it that I constantly see my friend and colleague, a certain Israeli from an Alexander teacher training school in Berkeley, who has been teaching the Technique for about 45 years, seemingly jump with excitement when connecting to a part of this work? And why does a sometimes grouchy John Baron scowl at the inside of the door of his teaching studio some mornings before opening it to welcome his first student, and then find himself moments later smiling, laughing, and enjoying his life as a teacher of this stuff because somehow this first student recounts a moment where he made a connection that had genuine meaning for his life?

I think it is a fair statement to say the magnitude of this work is indeed limitless! Just as life itself becomes more apparently limitless the more experience we have of it.

Most of us were probably unaware of the scale of this work when we showed up for our first lesson. I took my first lesson when I was about 22 years old, had back pain, plus a girlfriend who dragged me along to meet Mr. and Mrs. Walker—Dick and Elizabeth. I hadn't known what to expect, so was quite surprised to find myself taken immediately into a squat by both of the Walkers, placed into a lying down position on the floor,

and then moved around as if I were some jigsaw. My too-many questions as to what they were doing were briefly answered, as I understood later, with a fair amount of inhibition. But I remember clearly the end of the lesson. Somehow I had just opened up, and it felt both shocking and new. Of course, I wanted more and ended up taking my first series of lessons with these kind and pleasant people.

And eight years later, after having then experienced the work of Patrick Macdonald and having taken many lessons with Misha Magidov, I found myself enrolled in Misha's teacher-training course, but without really knowing why!

I've mentioned to several pupils—and even quite a few colleagues—I never ever meant to be a teacher of the Alexander Technique! In fact, even the decision to join a teacher-training course was made on the spur of the moment without having given it any serious prior thought—more of a whim than a decision, truth be told.

And for about a year and a half into the teacher-training, I thought I had made one of the biggest mistakes of my life! My fellow students in the class all seemed much more proficient and more connected to the work than I was. I had little talent for practical hands-on work in general, like repairing cars (I seemed to make them worse whenever I tried repairing them); and I was concerned this lack of talent would transfer to hands-on work.

However, at some point, in its own time, it all started to shift—not due to any direct effort on my part to change my fixed attitudes, I'd have to say. Rather, it was due to the Technique itself! The Alexander Technique work does seem to have a strange habit of showing up, irrespective of the preconceived opinions, positive or otherwise, that we and others have! We certainly play a role in teaching the Technique, but the work itself seems to be more of the teacher.

When I think of this work and remember the many people I've worked with, it's not the formal or the technical skills or the architectural structure of the Technique or the game plan or the nifty explanations or even the success stories I tend to remember (although I'm not knocking these down for sure). But what I seem to recall are all those many "life-enhancing" moments that just seem to show up from time to time. Of course, the tendency here is to define what this "is" is (to quote a famous politician) so it can then be analyzed, owned, and packaged—but that won't work here!

The Technique practiced as a means for just improving posture for its own sake—no small accomplishment either—can remain somewhat technical. But there is also the magic beyond the technical, perhaps part of the indirect nature of the work: in this space, letting life happen by not always having to fight life through all the tensions associated with doing, or, having fought



John A. Baron

and lost, then locked into the collapse patterns of disconnection. (Or in other words, dealing with life's little ups and downs.)

Yes, we all see physical changes, and the conditions of pain and discomfort in many students diminish; however, the work plays out in many other ways also. For example, how does one's most difficult, argumentative, and obnoxious student suddenly begin to express moments of "human-ness" that take us aback? Seeing them uncharacteristically express, for example, some small act of kindness, tells us more than any technical analysis of their Use! Yes, they might seem to have "fairly good Use" in that moment, but surely it is more than that! If so, what? This "what" can be referred to as the third element. This phenomenon in teaching situations seems connected to the indirect nature of our work. Given its elusive nature, it can't be taught directly, but as Alexander Technique teachers that shouldn't concern us; we already appreciate how powerful "non-doing" is or how "directing" is intent only, etc.

In my first years of teaching I gave many lessons where the work seemed to be teaching me rather than me teaching it. This could be puzzling at times. By applying the principle of Inhibition, we dispense with the familiar, so something else has to show up in its place. Therefore, finding the unexpected in the Alexander Technique is a common occurrence. It's also the case that the unexpected often finds us; however, it may not always be on our terms—or all that it's cracked up to be.

The Italian Job

Four months after qualifying from Misha's school, my wife and I found ourselves living in Rome, Italy. My intent had been to establish a small practice of say four or five pupils; and, because I didn't speak the language, I decided to just target the large international community living there. I had the requisite business cards printed and opened up shop in the apartment we had found in the city center.

Fast forward six months. Somehow the unexpected really had happened, as I found myself with a jam-full practice mainly of Italians, many of whom were musicians. Meanwhile I was doing my best to do the Alexander Technique justice relying only on my pidgin Italian, mimed instruction, and, thankfully, our hands-on communication. And there I was—a brand new teacher of the Alexander Technique taking what I'd learned into the big wide world, one that was quite foreign to me.

Some time later I got a telephone call from a flute teacher who was the former student of an excellent flautist I'd worked with, inviting me to come to work with her students at the Conservatorio di Musica in Cosenza. This conversation was in Italian and by this time I could follow quite a bit of it—or so I thought.

"*Certo!*" I said in response to the offer—that means "Certainly!"

In my halting Italian, I chatted with her about the friend we had in common before I asked for details about the business arrangements. The fee was X, all hotel and travel would be paid for, and there would be a small party afterwards to boot! Just to make sure I'd heard correctly I once again asked Daniella, the flautist and teacher, to repeat the arrangements we had just gone over. Yes, I had both heard and interpreted correctly! Amazing!

I'd never been offered such a stipend before for an Alexander Technique workshop, plus travel and accommodation expenses as well. I followed up with a series of:

Va bene's and Grazie's.

"*Ma questa presenatazione, quanto tempo ci vuole?*" Meaning: "This 'ere class—how long will it last?"

"*Tre ore, qualcosa di genere—Bo!*" "Three hours, something like that—kinda."

Remembering the advice I'd received from my friend, an American psychologist who had lived in Italy for many years and was forever doing workshops for Italians, I stressed to Daniella the importance of having a translator present at the workshop. She very readily agreed. I may have omitted to mention the main reason for having an interpreter present was the fact that I really needed one, given that my Italian wasn't grammatically kosher to say the least. The other reason: my psychologist friend's sage advice, "Always ask for an interpreter, even if you happen to be fluent!" Why?

"Because if you get a two-hour workshop you'll only have to do one hour of work!"

I like practical people!

My conversation continued with Daniella, my new flautist friend from Cosenza, in the course of which, I happened to ask how many students she had in her class at the Conservatory.

"*Proprio I miei studenti?*" Just my students?

"*Si.*"

"*Più o meno cerca quindici.*" "More or less about 15."

"*OK, OK, Va benissimo!*" I replied.

So date set, train tickets booked. Hotel booked. Wow this Alexander stuff was working out really well!

And then the day arrived. I caught the train to Cosenza, about three hours south of Rome. On the way there, I made a few notes thinking of some the work I'd done with flautists over the past several months. My main pitch would be "turn from the ankles—but with the idea of primary control" (after I'd had a go explaining it!). I'd then go through a polished explanation of the principles, with the help of my Interpreter of course, and then

explain and demonstrate some of the Alexander procedures, especially "hands-on-back-of-chair," a pièce de resistance for flautists. And then I'd finish off with some hands-on. With

approximately 15 of them, say two minutes each equaling 30 minutes, double it to an hour for interpretation, that would comfortably make up the last hour. Sounded fine! Always good to have a firm plan in place!

And now comes an example of Italian hospitality, which is truly unrivalled. I was actually met at the station by Daniella, accompanied by Marcello, who was to be the Interpreter. They drove me to my hotel and helped me settle in before heading off to the Conservatory. Daniella turned out to be a delightful and extremely positive person, and I found myself upbeat in her company.

You may be surprised to learn there are 68 music conservatories in the whole of Italy. Cosenza is a city of 70,000, really a large town, but still manages to support a Conservatory of Music housed within a fine and impressive building.

I was escorted into the building by Daniella and was immediately surprised to see how busy and thriving it all was. The main foyer was just crammed with Italians shouting and

**"Always ask for a translator, even if
you happen to be fluent."**

laughing. Many called greetings to each other and to Daniella as well, as she pushed through the crowds of students and teachers, me in tow, nodding at several in the crowd who'd kindly greeted me also. Both Daniella and Marcello excused themselves as they had people to see and would be back shortly, leaving me alone in the energy-filled foyer.

The foyer had several exits, and, as I looked to the right, I saw the entrance to what was obviously a concert hall. As most of the people had started heading in that direction, I thought I'd take a look while I was waiting.

It was a fairly large hall. What you might expect. Stage with two grand pianos. Lights. Auditorium. There must have been quite an event going on, as I guessed about 500 people were seated or still milling around.

Walking back to the foyer I was surprised to see so many Italians smile at me. They really are the best of people!

Not surprisingly I had started to experience the requisite "nerves" that seem to find us just before we begin a workshop or presentation. Perhaps it was due to Daniella still being nowhere around or that it was getting toward the start of the workshop. I waited a few minutes more and observed myself starting to get "antsy." You see, I prefer to get to the room beforehand. I can then feel it out, set out the chairs the way I want them, and slowly introduce myself to the workshop attendees as they drift in. By then I had started to look around impatiently for Daniella. And that's when I saw it! You could say I saw the unexpected. I stared at

this large poster with this name on it. A name I immediately recognized. There it was. The name: "John Baron!" Preceded by the ominous title of "Maestro." The name was in the middle of a handful of other names, some of which I also recognized—well-known musicians: string quartet, flautist, violinist, others, and above the name "John Baron" was something else I recognized—the date! It was the same one that was on my watch! And my watch told exactly the same time that was written so boldly on this Concert Series Poster—3pm!

I wish at that moment I had remembered the word "inhibition." But the only word I seemed to recall was "Bagno!" I started desperately moving around searching for the nearest Bagno. Someone was shouting my name. It was Daniella. What was even more confounding was that Daniella looked just as panicked as I was.

"John, John ci abbiamo un problema!" John, we have a problem!

"Sì, sono d'accordo!" Yeh, I agree!

"È Marcello." It's Marcello.

"What do you mean?"

"È scapatto!" "He's run away!"

I wasn't able to speak.

"È Marcello—poverino, è molto timido, sai?" Poor Marcello, he's very shy don't you know?

I kept repeating out loud the words "È scapatto!"

And then finally I say "Daniella, senti, pensavo che la classe era solo per i tuoi studenti. Non immagino mai..." Daniella, listen I thought the presentation was for your students only. I never imagined....

"John, dai!" she said waving her hands at me. "Dai" in Italian means "Oh come on." She sincerely thought I was joking, and Daniella was letting me know now was not the time.

All I could do was to try and pull my hysterical thoughts together, breathe, and start to give myself some advice. "Okay, prioritize, breathe one more time."

"Senti Daniella—devo andare al bagno!"

She pointed it out with the parting comment "Ma sbrigati!" But hurry up!

I'm in the bathroom eyes closed. "Okay, my neck is free, my head is forward and up please, my back is PLEASE lengthening and widening! You can't stay in here."

I returned. A slightly different, less panicked (or so it seemed) Daniella was waiting there.

"John, per quanto riguarda Marcello, non preoccuparti, caro, c'è qualcun' altro." John, about the Marcello thing, don't worry, my dear, there's someone else!

Ah, a lifeline!

And with that we walked into the concert hall and proceeded down the aisle to the front of the stage. Unfortunately, there was applause!

Honestly, that walk into the concert hall at Cosenza Conservatorio di Musica while being observed by the 500-strong audience (several rows of students stood at the back of the hall as all seats were taken) was the lowest point in the whole of my Alexander career. In fact, at that moment I wished I'd never even heard of the

Alexander Technique. I would have taken all my back pain back (the true meaning of "back back" perhaps) in order to avoid the oncoming onslaught. No Gladiator or Martyr walking through the tunnel into the Coliseum ever had it so bad!

My smile upon being introduced to the audience was the most insincere it's ever been.

"OK, John, think! Three hours. Translator scarpered. 500 people. In a language you're nowhere near knowing." Pause. "You can do this!!!!"

Meanwhile Daniella was speaking rapidly to the audience, some of which I was able to pick up. Something about "organizing a translator—unfortunately he is indisposed—Maestro della Tecnica Alexander—thank you for coming—has worked musicians orchestra di Santa Cecilia—Lui (I'm being pointed at)—un esperto—can anyone here translate?"

(I thought we'd already found one!)

Several in the audience raised their hands. Some even stood. The most vociferous of them walked up onto the stage.

Daniella: "Eh bravo, Giovanni!" Applause all round.

"Hi speaks hinnleesh!" Giovanni announces. At this point I noticed several in the audience starting to whisper among themselves.

Giovanni proceeds to shake my hand and then turns to the audience as if he's earned several curtain calls.

It's time to begin. It's gone quiet. I look at them. They look at me. Remembering a line from Tennyson's poem *The Charge of the Light Brigade*: "Into the valley of death rode the six hundred." I quickly push it out of my mind, take a breath—and—there's nothing for it—I begin.

I start by thanking NOT the Conservatory, or even Daniella, and definitely not that "Marcello—è-scappato," but my

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new friend Giovanni, a compliment readily taken as he begins bowing again.

Giovanni and I continue: "...how beneficial the Alexander Technique has been for musicians worldwide.... Many Conservatories and Drama Schools.... well-known musicians.... 69% of professional musicians suffer from, etc." But we're barely two or three sentences down the road before several in the audience start to make heckling sounds. I kid you not!

I thought I was doing as well as I could, considering the circumstances. I intentionally paused within a sentence, thereby giving Giovanni time to translate. I was including the back row as I spoke, which is what you're supposed to do, I supposed. I did realize, though, that I hadn't been listening much to what Giovanni was saying when he was doing his bit, because I'd been thinking of what to say next. And then the audience started to shout out loud.

"*Deh, Giovanni, cosa dice?*" Eh Giovanni, what are you saying?"

"*Lui non parla inglese per nulla!*" "He can't speak English for nothing!"

"*Scusa, Giovanni, non era così!*" "Excuse me, Giovanni, that wasn't it!"

At which point Giovanni starts to shout back at them. I think he said something about being near the top of his class in "Hingleesh" when he was in school. And so it continued back and forth until Giovanni finally stormed off the stage, went back to his seat, sat down, and sulked!

This was worse than a nightmare. It was more on the scale of "The Ride of the Valkyries" (Wagner's famous piece about death eaters).

Another gentleman stood up and confidently walked up onto the stage. "*Marco, hi will trensleet!*" He thrust his hand out, which I grabbed and held onto. Turning back to the audience, I bravely continued. Having Marco to back me up gave me renewed confidence, helping me to bravely go forth. So I gave them the bit about Alexander having lost his voice.... How he was a professional voice user, a Professional Reciter in Australia.... "Are there any singers in the audience by the way? Ah, so many? Amazing!" ...How he discovered he was tightening his.... I carried on, sharing Alexander's story from the chapter "Evolution of a Technique" in *The Use of the Self*. It soon became apparent, though, that the way Marco had started to tell Alexander's story, it could have been the story of someone else entirely! And yes, the translation hecklers were out in force once again. I had already had to correct one or two phrases Marco had used. And if I had had to correct him then.... "*Dio mio!*"

Okay. I was ten to fifteen minutes into my workshop for fifteen flute players that had magically transformed into a concert for the multitude of Cosenza, and I had come to the realization that all was not going according to plan. I made an executive decision! I called a halt to the proceedings. I thanked Marco for his help. I announced I would continue the what-ever-it-was without Marco's help (making Marco unhappy, several others happier) while using my own halting and very, very, very imperfect Italian!

My only consolation in finding myself in this situation was the knowledge that it could not get any worse. And, you will be pleased to hear, I hope, it actually did not get much worse.

You may also be further surprised to know that somehow, and don't ask me how because to this day I still don't know, but somehow in the midst of this "casino" (Italian for "unmitigated mess"), I began, ever so slowly, to start to connect to the work—or let's say the work was able to connect to me! Perhaps it had something to do with NOT having followed Marcello's lead when he ran away (which a smarter person would surely have chosen to do). As

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you know, I had continued with it all, despite and still.

So what else could I do at that moment? I mean, what else? I just attempted to speak of applying Alexander Technique principles, tried as best I could to explain, and then demonstrated Alexander Technique procedures. I asked students to go get their instruments and come up on stage. As they did, they told us of the challenges they faced playing their chosen instrument. I remember suggesting to a young violin student that he mark his score with breath marks, the same way some singers or wind players do, and be aware of the ease in his exhalation when practicing. And I remember putting a young singer into the position of mechanical advantage, as she re-launched herself back into her aria. This worked for both of them, the violinist finding more ease in his movement and expression, the singer finding more overtones in her sound. This all seemed to resonate with many in the audience, who were not shy about expressing their agreement out loud (these agreeable noises making a very welcome change from the previous heckling sounds). The more I myself connected to the work, the less labored my language skills became. And it started to go better, even "*meglio,*" more better!

Fortunately for me, Italians are truly generous to "*stranieri,*" foreigners, who make an attempt to speak their language. They don't pedantically correct; they happily encourage. And it turned out they were just fine listening to me butchering their language with my brand of pidgin Italian. Can you imagine if all this had occurred in a city in France? The French are notorious for superciliously correcting the French of every foreigner they can find. And the English are nearly as bad, always correcting the English of others, even when the others are English, and certainly if they happen to be American!

And so it continued. And then came "the moment I had been waiting for"—The End. After three hours the end finally came!

The relief was indescribable. But even amidst this utter chaos, I somehow had made a connection.

In this naive, imperfect presentation, the Alexander Technique work had made a connection to this audience, to me, and back again to this audience. This crazy Italian scene actually managed to eventually come alive—even if at times it seemed to resemble an Alexander/Fellini movie!

At the end of the day, yes, even at the end of this day, it all somehow worked. There was genuine interest and genuine appreciation for the Alexander Technique. Let's just say—even if we'd rightfully shoot the Messenger here—fortunately, the Technique can still work its magic!

So, a little story about how the work can show up even when we least expect it. I had many examples of this when living in Italy. I gave many lessons to people from all walks of life where the work seemed to be teaching me more than I was teaching it, and I consider that to have been my apprenticeship. Seeing others take to this work, apply the principles of inhibition and direction to their own lives, and then discover new connections to themselves is gratifying to witness and, strangely, so genuinely humbling.

The Vision Thing

As teachers, we are familiar with the technicalities in the Alexander Technique. We explain procedures and principles. We explain primary control, alignment, postural re-education plus the effectiveness of this work in reducing back pain, etc. Yet to explain how the Technique actually relates to one's Self and other Selves (I'm reminded of the title of Alexander's book, *The Use of the Self*) presents more of a challenge. We know from the writings of F.M. and many others that this work is on a much greater scale than the improvement of posture or the release of pain symptoms. Marjory Barlow in her 1965 F.M. Alexander Memorial Address said: "*The vision Alexander had of the possibility of individual evolution in the development of consciousness and awareness was the mainspring of his life's work.*"¹

Considering all this begs the questions:

So how are we connecting to this dimension of individual evolution of our work?

Are we creating a space that invites this development of consciousness and awareness?

What do we ourselves think of this connection?

Do we as teachers create the auditorium, the theater, in which this awareness might happen?

And once we and our pupils find this connection or this "up," then what?

The Alexander Technique is a creative element that enhances people's lives. It is creative in its very essence. What we loosely call the Up, opens up space in ourselves thus inviting a new experience of our Selves, which in turn invites a new experience of our being in the world. However, this doesn't simply happen by going through some technical process. The truly creative process tends to open up a new space, and it takes us away from technicalities and stale teaching tricks.

"Talk About a Man's Character..."

I believe the Alexander Technique is a different technique for each person. It is not a conveyor belt experience. After timely study and application of the work, the challenge we then find is in making the work personal, actually making it our own. The same applies to our pupils.

Through the means of this work, we often discover that our character and the characters of others seem to change as we make changes in our Use. It is not prompted, it is not coerced, it is not put together from a "how to" book. This change happens

more indirectly, kinda creeps up on us. Perhaps, what is referred to as *personal growth* happens more indirectly!

The "up" or "primary control" is, of course, found in everyone (and I'll go so far as to say it should be found in everyone, so please don't tell me this work is not marketable), and this "up" can also be seen as a creative space where connections can be made. The Technique invites change from the familiar to the unfamiliar; as such, it cannot *but* help affecting us personally. Experiencing this and then verifying this connection, through what FM called *conscious control*, really does give us "a skill for life!"

We are already connected in nature. It is the way we disconnect through mal-adaptation to our world that presents the great challenge. Intentionally applying Alexander Technique principles to the threads of this disconnect invites connection. And the ease we can then find in ourselves reflects the ease of being connected to our own nature—another example of the unexpected at work, perhaps.

Of Images, Metaphors, and the Language of the Hands

Bringing the Alexander Technique work alive on a daily basis is our challenge both as students and as teachers. Many pupils use images and metaphors to recount their experience. One pupil "now feels like a lion" (it was a guy), another feels like the door to a bird cage has suddenly opened; recently after enthusiastically walking around the studio after a table turn, a student said, "I feel like I've just won at Crufts!" (Crufts is the famous pedigree dog show.) And others' descriptions: great weights lifted, not raining anymore, flying, Humpty Dumpty's back on his wall, etc. Bringing image and metaphor to our own work helps us better understand the connections and discoveries we make. To quote Aristotle: "The soul never thinks without an image."

If I were to suddenly ask all of you: "What photos, images, paintings, or music come to mind that reflect your first 'personal' Alexander moment?" or "If you are to imagine a symbol of what this work means to you, what would that be?"

We could even ask ourselves, "What images arise for us when our students explain either the successes or the struggles they encounter when applying the work on their own?" These questions can't be addressed as if they were a multiple-choice

test. Image and metaphor are unique to each person, making it impossible to give standard responses.

The image that had an impact on my own Alexander teaching happens to be Leonardo da Vinci's Vitruvian Man. We are so familiar with this image that it has become a cliché, especially in advertising circles (and even in tattoo parlors). I had long been familiar with this two-dimensional image of man, drawn inside a perfect circle, limbs in two places at once. One day, though, as I was walking inside Rome Airport, I happened to look up and saw a huge modern sculpture of Vitruvian Man. And I was so taken aback because it was not the two-dimensional image I was used to seeing. This was sculpture. Therefore, it was in three dimensions and in an instant it made sense! It spoke of positional force, lengthening and widening, balance, direction of directional-energy, openness, up—as if the

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openness of space inside and outside the human frame were in fact spherical, perhaps something like the shape of a sun itself! It was an immediate—even an emotional—connection, and a connection I am able to access even now.

If we were to use this three-dimensional image of Vitruvian Man for the giving of Alexander Technique directions, then the direction “up the spine” has context within the whole three-dimensional human frame. Connecting this “up” direction to the directions: “back-back, knees forward and away, heels down,” enabled me to access oppositional force/directions more effectively. The same was true when giving directions to pupils hands-on. What seems obvious now, but wasn’t before seeing this sculpture, is that lengthening and widening extend into all the limbs and outward. We might even see these oppositional forces as approximating Vitruvian Man inside his very own cozy, three-dimensional directional sphere.

The personal connection here was the movement between both images, from two to three dimensions—this movement helping to open up my own work, reflecting a movement from the technical to the personal.

Shortly after this, I visited my old friend, Alexander Technique teacher and mentor Misha Magidov and related this story. He told me his directional image for lengthening and widening was one of those blow-up toys like the Michelin Man.

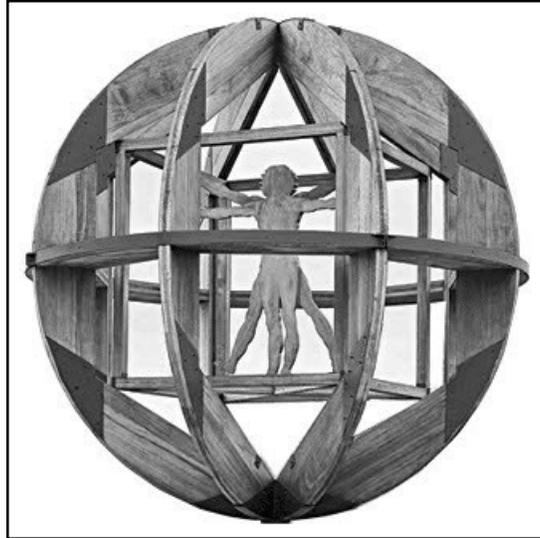
Images and metaphors make sense to us individually. But if we were to share our images or metaphors with the people next to us without offering any explanation, just the images themselves, we would probably not make much sense. In fact, at best they might find it all a bit peculiar. But it is the language of image and metaphor that makes sense to us individually and that captures the *depth* of experience. (Likewise, attempting to define the sense and the depth of experience inherent in the Alexander Technique using only words does not quite cut it.)

I’m not suggesting we ask all our pupils to give us their prevailing metaphor/image for Alexander work every five minutes or so. I also don’t wish to give the impression that these images be used to lead or *initiate* Alexander work (thus leading us into “faulty sensory” territory). The type of images that I’m referring to seem to come to us *after* experience and then make present sense of things that have gone before.

It could be that there is a connection between the language of metaphor and the “language of the hands!” Both involve the opening up of space. In art, certain animals, plants, and colors were symbols for fertility, power, or wisdom etc. Poetry gives us deep emotional meaning from the images and metaphors poets use. In certain schools of psychology, images and metaphors from dreams even have the power to exorcise the appalling darkness inhabiting many a soul. Opening up to this other space, either using images/metaphor of the artist, poet, or psychologist, or indirectly, by the hands-on work of the

Alexander Technique teacher, invites an opening to this personal connection. The work itself opens up this space, and metaphoric perceptions or kinesthetic perceptions that come from this opening, let’s say an opening or an expansion of the Self, will happen should one choose to “let, discover, allow” etc.

When we speak of “hands-on-work” (that, in my book, is the unique element of this work and the means for experiencing a change in the embodiment of this sense of self), we probably all have varying ideas as to what it is supposed to be. Let’s return to the source, then, and consider what F.M. Alexander had to say about hands-on work:



Three-dimensional sculpture of Leonardo da Vinci's Vitruvian Man. This sculpture, by Assen Peikov, is located at Fiumicino “Leonardo da Vinci” airport in Rome.

*The teacher, having made his diagnosis of the cause or causes of the imperfections or defects which the pupil has developed in the incorrect use of himself, uses expert manipulation to give to the pupil the new sensory experiences required for the satisfactory use of the mechanisms concerned, the while giving him the correct guiding **orders** or directions which are the counterpart of the new sensory experiences which he is endeavouring to develop by means of his manipulation.”²*

Quite a task he sets for us, eh? (And one not easily replicated via Skype Lessons.)

Creating this new sensory experience of the Self in others is surely an art, and the follow-on effects for our pupils can be surprisingly creative for them as well. Creative process opens up space. This works the other way round, also, this space (“up,” “primary control,” “openness”) encourages an opening-up to creative processes. As has already been said, the work itself is creative in essence. The ways in which it is creative are many. Here are just three examples related to business, science, and the arts:

In Business

When trading it is vitally important I have a balanced composition detached from outcome. This means being connected in myself, not just physically but on all levels of myself so my thoughts actions and expression are experienced with ease. The Alexander Technique has shown me this. The results are: I find myself calmer, clearer, more creative in my thinking, and consequently, more effective when trading.

—Hans Overturf, Hedge Fund Manager

In considering this quote, an image that comes to mind is of traders at the New York Stock Exchange hysterically waving sell tickets. The “Use” they generally have, whenever I’ve seen them doing this, seems quite the opposite from our Alexander

Technique Businessman, who has created a new way of “doing business” for himself, a way not founded on mere ideas of open-mindedness, but on discovering more openness in himself.

In Science

We can observe how Alexander Technique principles influence and sometimes change our wiring/neurology. The habit of “end-gaining thinking” actually has us wired out of time: Our “end” to be gained, more often than not, is in a time zone way ahead of current action—thereby rendering it nigh on impossible to “be here now,” as they say! Inhibition helps clear old neurological pathways. Direction, which connects thought and action, helps establish not only new neurological pathways, but also encourages new ways of being! (It still amazes me that FM was able to understand and bring the mind/body connection into an actual experience in the moment.)

Recently, we have seen some areas of science start to move the goalposts of objectivity and open new space for considering the importance of subjective experience. Most people here will be familiar with the current research into cognitive science and the Alexander Technique that values subjective experience. In this way, science is relating more to “living experience”—to understanding the actual experience of people, rather than mere analysis of data about people.

In the Arts

Once artists (visual, dance, sculpture, actor, etc.) study the Alexander Technique enough to have a fair command of their own Use, they have the opportunity to apply the principles of this work directly to their own art form. Inhibiting immediate reaction—and becoming aware of the predictable ways that reaction is embodied through habit—creates a third space for new perceptions to enter. For example, actors studying a new role may have a tendency to quickly interpret the image that they have of their characters, especially if the interpretation is based solely on ideas/concepts/analysis. For the actor, inhibiting this tendency and intentionally directing their Use in specific and creative ways may provide them with other images of the character they are playing.

Conclusion

Leaving behind the businessman, scientist, and artist for a while, let’s come back to the Alexander Technique teacher. According to Marjory Barlow: “Ideally, the teacher has to be a craftsman in the use of his hands, a scientist in his adherence to principles which are subject to ‘operational verification’ and an artist in conveying his knowledge to others.”³

As this work opens more doors than any of us may have ever expected, and as we continue to open more to the personal and to the creative nature inherent in this work, I’d like to say “Thank you, AmSAT, for inviting me to speak. Thank you,

Liz and Kosta, for organizing.” And I’ll end by saying “Thank you all for listening; and continue to expect, share, and enjoy the unexpected in the Alexander Technique!

Endnotes

1. Marjory Barlow, 1965 F.M. Alexander Memorial Lecture, printed in full in her book: *An Examined Life: Marjory Barlow in conversation with Trevor Alan Davies* (Berkeley: Mornum Time Press, 2002), 278.
2. F.M. Alexander, *Conscious Constructive Control of the Individual* (London: STAT Books, 1997), 111.
3. Barlow, *Life*, 282.

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