

## Alexander Technique as an auto-ethological mode of differing inquiry

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### Abstract

In practice, the work of F.M Alexander can sometimes facilitate, enliven or accentuate embodied experience and awareness (Dimon, 2015; Jones, 1976). It can also provide a means whereby the 'psycho-physical instrument of self' becomes more readily co-ordinated within its own system of organisation and simultaneously, in relation to whatever it encounters in the world. McCormack's (2013) reading of Dewey's "ethology of experience" is salient here, where experience is conceptualised as open-ended, affective, and 'radically experimental'. Our interest lies in the subtle, barely-perceptible difference/s that sometimes emerge/s when we contemplate/engage a thought, an object, a connection, or an encounter with a freshly-attuned, embodied instrument. Experiencing these differences might also point to some unexplored ways of being in, and coming-to-know, the worlds we inhabit and inquire into.

**Keywords:** Alexander Technique, auto-ethology, psycho-physical habit, kinaesthesia, and experience-as-experiment

*And it's about persisting: persisting in the moving midst of that which is coming into being. This might sound willfully mystical. It's not. It's about the difficult work of sustaining and supporting this emerging sense of something happening in a way that is both rigorous yet open (McCormack, 2015, p. 99).*

### Introduction

This paper seeks to cultivate an "emerging sense" (McCormack, 2015, p. 99) of some potentially different thinking related to how we undertake educational, ethnographic, auto-ethnographic, ethnological, and even ethological research. After identifying and acknowledging some modes of inquiry that move in different (and differing) directions to those taken by foundationalist and representational methodologies, I offer two simple prompts and some related questions for the reader to engage with/respond to. These prompts and questions are designed to promote a subtly

different sense of 'self-in-process', a sense that might, in turn, bring something different or otherwise to bear on the way we engage in/with the act of thinking and coming-to-know. The prompts and questions are a substitute for what might conventionally be facilitated by some actual hands-on work between a teacher of the Alexander Technique and another person (usually considered the 'student' or 'pupil'). In such an encounter, the other person/student is invited to reappraise their habits of bodymind so that the prospect of something less familiar, unknown, yet potentially interesting might become possible. There is no attempt to impose anything different on, or to 'correct' in the other person/student. Rather, an open invitation to explore is offered, on the assumption that if we give up something of what we know and/or are comfortable with, or sure of, then we might encounter something different, unexpected or potentially useful.

### **Differing modes of in\$quiry**

One problem with 'methods' in the context of conventional research (seeking to produce reasoned knowledge) is the way they act as a "safeguard against the ineffable" (Manning, 2015, p. 58). Within a methodo-logical paradigm, things/phenomena/objects of inquiry only exist if they can be categorised and provide an account of themselves. McCormack (2015) draws a useful distinction between 'methods' and 'techniques', initially favouring the latter over the former, before settling on "methodological technique" as a useful composite for equipping us "to be empirical in different ways such that we make more of the worlds in which we move available for thinking-how we draw difference out, how we make it palpable" (p. 94).

Manning directs us towards the "tremulousness of thinking in the act" (2016, p. ix). Springgay and Truman (2018) play with possibilities of "doing research differently" with a certain "quivering unease" (p. 204). Stewart (2017) too, in teasing out new possibilities for worlding-affected anthropology/ethnography, invites a method that "tries to move in the manner of things slipping in and out of existence. One that makes demands on visceral imaginaries and the sensoria" (p. 197). In this mode, as Stewart suggests, the thought process involved seeks to "describe the thing [sic] that also propels it", operating under conditions of "emergence and precarity" (p. 197). Such an ethnographic mode has to be "both nimble and patient, jumping with the unexpected event but also waiting for something to throw together" (p. 197). In an earlier work, Stewart (2008) embraces Sedgwick's notion of 'weak theory' to describe the workings of various "modes of attunement and attachment", out of which a certain kind of "noticing" is possible that "gropes from a haptic space in the middle of things" (p. 71). McCormack (2017) steadily, thought-fully, and imaginatively under the influence of Stewart, seeks to foreground circumstances and worldings that give shape to "non-coincident forces such that they become conditions of palpability" (p. 7).

Manning, McCormack, Stewart, Springgay and Truman, and others (eg. Vannini, Waskul & Gottschalk, 2012; Vannini, 2015) are interested in post-phenomenological and non-representational modes of inquiry, situatedness, thought, and analysis that moves out of the human-centred, enclosed, reiterative modes and spaces commonly occupied by ethnographers, anthropologists, sociologists and educational researchers. These impulses and modes can work to loosen up, even liberate both researchers and the worlding scenes they inhabit, the better to

‘touch’, grapple with, and extrude more of the nuances and poetics that inhere within them. We can appreciate and be grateful for the way some of these leading voices conceptualise subjectivities and experiences as entangled and co-mingled with larger forces of affective worldings, of which we are but random expressions and vehicles for further articulations. Although not only expressions and articulations but also, at different times, variously “amplifying, attuning, defamiliarizing, drawing out, following, foregrounding, gathering, holding in place, providing some constraint, tracing and tracking, scattering” (McCormack, 2015, p. 94).

We might also ask, however, whether those leading voices might be deflecting an important, or useful dimension in their pursuit of something other/more-than/different to that which is typically permitted or foreclosed within no-more-than-human research practices. Some researchers, keen to re-deploy the senses, and the sensate, call on the need for more “somatic work” (Vannini, Waskul & Gottschalk, 2012, p. 21), honing a “sensory intelligence” (p. 62) in order to undertake (and write) “sensuous scholarship” (p. 63) or perform ‘sensory sociology’ (Coleman, 2017). These are useful provocations, well supported by argument and discussion. Perhaps, too, there is room for a fuller and more nuanced incorporation of the somatic, sensory, and sensuous experiences of the researcher in their actual practices of doing research, a greater openness towards the methodo-sensorial alongside the methodo-logical. This requires more than just a nominal acknowledgement, and needs to be infused with the ‘blood, breath and bones’ of the researchers themselves, not just their objects of inquiry.

### Touching matters

It is noteworthy that the sense of touch (groping, haptic, palpable) is commonly evoked more than just metaphorically in the ‘sensory turn’ (e.g. McCormack, 2017; Stewart, 2008; Vannini, Waskul & Gottschalk, 2012) and works well to counter the dominant ocular-centrism at play (notwithstanding that the subtitle of Vannini’s edited collection on non-representational methodologies slips back into *Re-Envisioning Research*). It is also the actual, immediate, hands-on use of touch that F.M. Alexander (1923/1987; 1932/1985) found to be a subtle yet effective way to support and guide his pupils towards accessing a different corporeal, and corporo-relational awareness. This is the way teachers of the Alexander Technique continue to work, and these manual skills can sometimes be for the benefit of both pupil and teacher. While this mode of touch is not possible to replicate on paper, it might be possible to generate some of the sensorial affects for the reader indirectly, via two simple prompts and related questions (see below).

Alexander’s work became more popularly known as a ‘Technique’ against his wishes. If anything, he devised a ‘technique’ for assisting people to critically investigate the ways they habitually inhabit the world, both within and about themselves. The cautionary and creative notes on method and technique by arts-based and non-representationalist researchers are salient here. Manning and Massumi (2014) argue against notions of technique as “descriptive devices”, preferring to think of them as “springboards. They are not framing devices—they activate a practice from within. They set in motion” (p. ix). This could certainly stand in well as a useful definition of Alexander’s ‘technique’, one that acts as a springboard, activating a practice from within, setting in

motion some new and different possibilities for inquiring, becoming, being-with, and coming-to-know.

As researchers, as well as in everyday life, what do we do with whatever we are able to sense about ourselves? The autonomic rhythms of our breath; the sometimes subtle and distinct movements of limbs; the multifarious orientations in, and mobilisations through space, however large or small; our co-ordinations, calibrations and postural deliberations? Or, what gets done with that which we sense about ourselves?

### **Dewey, F.M Alexander and some other key figures**

Dewey devoted a lot of attention to the nature of thinking and produced a monograph on *How We Think* (1910). Essential elements, for Dewey, included critical reasoning and reflection; a balance of playfulness and seriousness; a combination of inductive and deductive procedures; and above all, a sense of curiosity and wonder. For Dewey, especially in its “first manifestation”, curiosity is “a vital overflow, an expression of an abundant organic energy” (p.31). There is (too) much to unpack in this brief description, yet the qualities of aliveness, excess, abundance, movement, externalisation and potency might, at the very least, make us curious (cf. Sontag, 1996). The organic dimension too, begs many questions. Is there a/some material origin to curiosity and if so, where might that lie, and what form/s might it/they take? Even if we can’t locate the material origins of curiosity, how can we touch it, in its materiality? Or is Dewey’s notion of the organic more abstract and if so, what kind of weight and force might it still have, if any?

Alexander was an Australian-born actor (from the southern island of Tasmania) who developed his ideas and practice in Melbourne and Sydney, as well as Auckland (New Zealand) between about 1885 and 1900. He left Melbourne for London in 1904 and never returned to Australia. Not insignificantly, it was the curiosity of a few women early childhood educators that helped Alexander gain more public exposure and traction for his work. Their interests in the child-centred, materials-based pedagogies of Froebel and Montessori set up affinities with Alexander’s work. In London, the women included Ethel Webb, Irene Stewart and Irene Tasker. In New York, it was Margaret Naumburg, a graduate student of Dewey, who was also doing pioneering work combining psychoanalysis and art-making for therapeutic purposes. Naumburg introduced Dewey to Alexander in 1915-1916, and Dewey sought out Alexander for lessons as often as Alexander was in New York, or he in London. The main point to draw from these historical markers is that Alexander’s work is rooted in educational discourses and practices, even if contemporary educators and educationalists are less aware of these origins and connections.

Tim Ingold (2018) provides a useful bridge for some of our purposes here. He was invited to deliver a series of lectures in honour of Dewey in 2016 which took him into a major, systematic reading of Dewey for the first time. The lecture series was then reworked into *Anthropology and/as Education*. In this work, Ingold both champions Dewey for his prescience and insights, and also puts education forward as that which ‘leads life’ by “opening paths of intellectual growth and discovery without predetermined outcomes or fixed end-points. It is about attending to things, rather than acquiring the knowledge that absolves us of the need to do so, about exposure rather

than immunisation” (p. ix).

Alexander’s ‘neglected influence’ on Dewey has been well documented (McCormack, 1958/1992). Dewey’s influence on Alexander has also been more recently traced (Williamson, 2015). Dewey was clearly reluctant to make much reference to Alexander in his serious writings on philosophy and education, likely because familiarity with Alexander’s work was virtually non-existent within the academy, and only marginally recognised in the related fields of health and medicine. Dewey wrote crystal-clear and laudatory Introductions to three out of the four books written and published by Alexander in their shared lifetimes (Alexander 1923/1987; Alexander, 1932/1985). In these pithy Introductions, Dewey not only demonstrates what a serious student he had been over many years but more importantly, just how highly he regarded the principles and applications of Alexander’s work in educational terms. Nevertheless, for all that has and can be written about the Alexander Technique, an actual hands-on, experiential component has also been integral to the work since Alexander first took to incorporating touch in his teaching. This is where, inevitably, I fall short in an academic paper such as this one, given the impossibility of an immediate tactile encounter. Nevertheless, I will endeavor to offer a few prompts that might provide a fleeting glimpse of the more immediate qualities and/or sensory awareness that hands-on Alexander work typically generates for the student/recipient.

#### *Prompt #1*

In the first of these prompts, I invite you to think about the chair you are (most likely) sitting on, and the floor that the chair and your feet are connected to...The floor and the chair are y/our given supports, acting in a constant way to provide stability and security for y/our actions (i.e. sitting, reading, writing, thinking, breathing, observing). One question to consider might be whether or not you are allowing the chair and floor to do their full share of the work in supporting you? Or might you be doing something in your habitual way of sitting (or standing) that is preventing some of this external work from being done for you, thereby taxing your internal support system (of skeleton, muscle and nerve) more than is actually required to prop you up, reliably?

What do you notice, even if only small, if anything at all?

What different sensations are you experiencing, anywhere, if at all?

How, if at all, has your sense of orientation in space shifted?

How, if at all, might your sense of the space around you have shifted?

What different thoughts, or associations, (or irritations), might this be provoking, if any?

Make your own ‘mental’ or manual notes about this.

~ *pause* ~

The above prompt and accompanying questions relate to subjectivity, habit, action/behavior, the

force of change, ways of knowing (epistemology) and ways of being (ontology). There is an assumption operating that we do have *some* stability, and *some* fluidity as 'human subjects', and that we have the capacity to influence, variously and differently, how we come to know something, either about ourselves, and/or about the worlds we inhabit. These ways of knowing are registered, processed, and mediated through our senses (Serres, 2011), as well as through our faculties of reasoning, reflecting, analysing, connecting, theorising, feeling, intuiting, musing, affecting, being affected, and perhaps more besides.

~ *pause* ~

### Alexander's practice and pedagogy

Alexander was interested in exploring psycho-physical habit as a way of unsettling any restrictive impacts of the entrenched mind/body binary generated (and mostly reinforced) in Western academic and popular discourses and modes. Alexander (1932/1985) also utilised the notion of 'the self' as a way of subverting the same mind/body binary. He found that activating and refining the use of *touch for pedagogical purposes* helped communicate his ideas in a way that by-passed the pupil's tendency to mis/interpret his words of instruction through the conditioned (cognitive-interpretative) filters they relied on. As well as by-passing the pupil's habitual ways of knowing themselves and responding to either an external prompt or internal impulse, Alexander discovered that his tactile (actual hands-on) mode of teaching tended to enliven and/or enhance the kinaesthetic sense in his pupils. Garlick (1990) referred to this (typically amongst populations in Western scientific-rationalist cultures) as 'the lost sixth sense'. This sense remains lost, or obscured, even in studies by contemporary phenomenologists of the senses (e.g. Abram, 1997; Classen, 2012). When kinaesthesia is discussed, it is usually in relation to its prominence in/importance for dance/movement practices (e.g. Vannini, Waskul & Gottschalk, 2012), or in sporting prowess (e.g. Sparkes, 2009). Sheets-Johnstone (2011) developed a sophisticated bio-kinetic-aesthetic philosophy of dance and movement over many decades and noted, in relation to the kinaesthetic sense that, "What we commonly take for granted... is not uncommonly so much a part of our everyday lives that we fail to notice it and thereby pass over any genuine understanding of it" (p. 121).

As both a long-time student and teacher of the Alexander Technique, I maintain a keen interest in how a more awakened or refined kinaesthetic sense might be useful or advantageous for all kinds of people. More specifically, in the context of this paper, I am interested in the condition and functionality of our kinaesthetic sense, and how we might-even as academics and researchers-benefit from refining and/or harnessing this sense more consciously and purposefully. Here is where one of the distinctive features of Alexander's work might have some purchase. Through his writings, as well as in his practical work, Alexander assumed that "the accuracy or otherwise of the individual conception of any idea depends upon the standard of psycho-physical functioning and sensory appreciation. Modern methods of education disregard this essential" (Brown, 1992, p. 48). This is a highly provocative, subversive, potentially transformative, if not also controversial claim. The suggestion being made here is that whatever we think/conceive/perceive/experience/enact is

to some extent conditioned, shaped, inflected and possibly also skewed by the degree of one's psycho-physical co-ordination at the moment of thinking/conceiving/perceiving/experiencing/enacting. If we can permit the importance of this dimension, then questions emerge as to how we gauge and come-to-know the degree and/or reliability of our psycho-physical co-ordination, and by which measures or indicators? It needs also to be stated here that the aim of any 'Alexander intervention' is not to adjust or correct a person towards a normative or prescribed set of functional conditions but rather, for the person/student to be given an opportunity to experience a different sense of psycho-physical co-ordination that may or may not be of some further interest for them to pursue. As Alexander stated:

*You can't do something you don't know, if you keep on doing what you do know*  
(Alexander, 1989, p. 5, italics added).

The conjuncture of psycho-physical co-ordination, sensory appreciation, and how we think, is the cutting/growth edge that needs to be centralised here. The aspect to emphasise is the notion of the 'psycho-physical', a still-inadequate term for denoting the unity of intention and action, of form and feeling, of thought and understanding, of conceptualisation and realisation. The more co-ordinated the functioning, the more immediate, unimpeded and informative the sensory feedback. Thus, if I inadvertently disturb the delicate balance of my head atop my spine, and become alert to this, I might recognise it as equally a distortion of my orientation, perceptions and thought processes. Once I redirect my head to balance more freely atop my spine, and receive reliable sensory feedback on the success of this recalibration, then I can renew permission for my intention to direct my attention, or curiosity, or line of inquiry, or preferred action. It is the refined and disciplined exploration of head balance and orientation that is a core component of the Alexander work, as it is this 'top end' relationship that Alexander discovered to be of primary importance in all vertebrate structures, and thus our/their organisation, orientation and mobilisation. With a head balancing freely, the spine might also be able to operate in other-than habitual ways as the central axis around which both thought and action are organised, co-ordinated, and mobilised.

*On what basis then do we typically, or habitually, gauge and monitor the direction and quality of our thoughts and actions? Furthermore, on what basis do we gauge the reliability or otherwise of the apparatus that shapes our thoughts and actions, or even consider the nature of the apparatus?*

### **Experience-as-experiment**

Unavoidably perhaps, the discussion and questions above proceed (to varying degrees) from the assumption that we do obtain autonomous, distinctive, perhaps even 'unique' experiences of 'ourselves' and the world we inhabit. There are many pitfalls and limitations with such an assumption, appearing as it does to isolate, privilege and centralise an independent human subject ahead of structural and structuring forces, relational processes, other-than-human bodies, affective circumstances, potentials for becoming, engines of worlding, and the like. A Deleuzian account of experience can be helpful in addressing these limitations as for Deleuze, experience is "that milieu which provides the capacity to affect and be affected; it is a-subjective and

impersonal. Experience is not an individual property; rather subjects are constituted in relations within experience itself, that is, by means of individuation via haecceity” (Semetsky, 2005, p. 89). de Freitas (2018), more recently, has argued the need for educational researchers to pay closer attention to the “*exteriority of experience*” (p. 294, italics in original). While recognising the importance of this shift and reorientation for educational research and critical pedagogy, it is noteworthy that Semetsky also refers to how experience is “rendered meaningful not by grounding empirical particulars in abstract universals but **by experimentation**” (p. 89, emphasis added).

This thinking about experience-as-experiment appears to go back through Deleuze and Nietzsche, to Spinoza, while also being echoed in Dewey. McCormack (2013) notes the influence of Alexander’s work on Dewey, suggesting that while Alexander’s influence has “to be set within the wider affirmation of the somatic basis of thinking and learning in society, it also reveals something of the experimental ethos informing his [Dewey’s] work” (p. 28). William James, too, regarded experience as “at least potentially, radically experimental” (McCormack, 2013, p. 26). The notion of (individual) experience as radically experimental can be usefully adopted in a research context, to guard against tendencies for human subjectivity and subjective biases to exert undue influence on a research project or agenda. The experimental mode strongly encourages the continuous play of instability, impermanence, changeability, indeterminacy, uncertainty, chance, and “the impersonal forces excessive of a life” (McCormack, 2017, p. 3). This mode also tempts the individual and collective un-thought, some of which might even be agitating at the edges for readers of this paper. It only takes a gestural force with enough charge in it to open y/our/experience to “its potential variation. It does this from within experience itself, activating as a shifting tone, a difference in quality” (Manning, 2016, p. 1), perhaps helping to articulate “how else experience can come to expression” (p. 7). Experiencing the potential variations, or differing qualities of the previously un-thought, enhances the prospects for the intensification of life itself, “enriched with desire”, as Deleuze and Guattari would have it (Semetsky, 2005, p. 90).

### The ethological imperative

Various feminist philosophers (e.g. Braidotti, 2013; Gatens, 1996; Grosz, 2017; Rothfield, 2017) and some socio-cultural theorists (e.g. Duff, 2010; 2014; 2016; McCormack, 2013; 2017) explore modes of being and becoming that are generated outside the individual-subjective stance, positing assemblages and ecologies of practice, circumstances, atmospheres, and/or events that simultaneously resist any tendency to expand or extrapolate collective principles, species-wide qualities, or universal givens derived from the individual, the situated, and the particular. The goals for such projects can be and often are, we should note, quite small, modest, and minor. For McCormack (2015), with a nod to Lauren Berlant, interest lies in inventing “new *genres* of thinking and writing that make the structuring force of affect in the ordinary more palpable” (p. 93, italics in original). The aim here, however, is not just academic, or literary, or methodological, or intellectual. It is one of “finding ways of moving about or within worlds rather than figuring out how to get at them from without” (p.94). In the process of finding new or different ways of moving and/or being in the world, we might also find ourselves “making variations in the world” (p.94).



Variations that might be suggestive of something other, less/er known, experimental, inquisitive or queerious (sic). Variations too, that might, given the “violence of the world...make it possible not to aspire to, [or to] be at war, or to be right” (Berlant, 2018, p. 161).

### Prompt #2

If you, the reader, are able to take yourself into standing, please do...and then ask yourself...

Am I doing anything more than I need to do (inadvertently), in order to keep myself standing reliably? Or,

Am I doing anything (inadvertently, habitually) that is preventing the floor (on which I am standing) from providing optimal support for my balancing structure?

Can I detect any relationship between the balance of my head atop my spine, and my overall sense of balance?

Does my sense of optimal balance equate, convincingly, with a sense of ‘minimal effort’?

And finally,

On what basis do I gauge whether minimal effort is prevailing?

~ *pause* ~

A further sequence of questions arise, returning first to Berlant’s (2018) reference to the palpability of affect:

*How might the variations of the world become more palpable, and (potentially) more actionable?*

*What conditions are needed for us to be/come more palpable, or to be open and receptive to the palpations of the world? What is the mechanism, or mode, by which any palpable affects might be registered?*

The palpable, as that which ‘touches’ us and effects a shift in our affective responses, is usually only referred to in a metaphorical or (ironically) intangible way.

*So, what other, or further, difference/s might become possible when actual, direct, physical (‘fleshy’) touch is included in the inquiry? More particularly, what might such inclusion (of physically touching, or being touched) add to (or change) in relation to our habitual ‘senses of self’, ‘senses of world’, ‘worlding of senses’?*

These questions point to notions of ‘embodiment’, ‘embodied experience’, or corporeal mediation. Such terms, however, need to be used advisedly, given the dubious existence of ‘the (human) body’ as such, and the varieties of ‘human’, discursive, and other bodies. Thinking in terms of volatile (Grosz, 1994) or multiple (Fox, 2012) bodies can be useful, but these tend to remain flat on the page, abstracted, ‘disembodied bodies’. Deleuze’s ‘Bodies without Organs’

(BwO) appear to be inflected towards everything other than and beyond the flesh, blood, and bones of living, breathing, in/post/a-human creatures. Gatens (1994) suggested that the concept of BwO might be both “misleading and the source of many misinterpretations” (n.22, p. 185). This is also where, for Gatens (1996) and others (Grosz, 2017; Duff, 2014), ethology comes into its own. Unlike biology, which establishes and prescribes normative behaviours and actions, “ethology does not claim to know, in advance, what a body is capable of doing or becoming. Ethology picks out similarities and differences in terms of a body’s powers of affecting and being affected. What can this body do? what are its typical relations with other bodies and what are its typical powers? what makes it weaker? what makes it stronger?” (Gatens, 1996, p. 169; see also Pont, 2019).

When thinking and evaluating more along ethological lines, Gatens (1996) suggests that a BwO might be better thought of as a “body-without-organized-organs (BwOO)” (n. 22, p. 185). Such a strategy could work well to de-classify, de-categorise, and de-hierarchise (de-territorialise?) ‘the body’ and its functions, regarded by Deleuze as a “judgmental organization of the organs”, the better to promote a “principle of composition or of harmonics of bodies and their exchanges” (p. 167). Gatens also notes, following Deleuze, that “one does not have to undo every knot in the plane of organization in order to weave new patterns on the plane of immanence” (p. 175). Embodied subjects then, individuate “according to principles of composability, sets of fast or slow combinations, the range of affects and degrees of affectability” (p. 167). Indeed, they/we might, and can individuate according to these various principles, sets, ranges and degrees. However, they/we are still left with the problem of that which they/we register with/in them/ourselves pertaining to balance, orientation, direction, weight-distribution, co-ordination, and degrees of effort. These responses might typically be thought of as aspects of the kinaesthetic sense which, within the discourse of the Alexander Technique, is also referred to as “proprioception” (e.g. Dimon, 2015, p. 100), or “kinesthetic perception” (Jones, 1976, p. 155). What do we notice about these ‘harmonics’, from moment to moment, and what role do they play in our thoughts, perceptions, actions and reactions?

The Dutch ethologist Nikolaas Tinbergen provides another useful bridge here. He devoted nearly ten minutes of his 1973 Nobel prize acceptance speech to the pioneering work of F.M. Alexander, drawing parallels between Alexander’s ethological work and his own. Tinbergen’s speech can be accessed online, wherein he states on behalf of his fellow ethologists that Alexander’s “achievements, and those of his pupils, deserve close attention” (Tinbergen, 1973, np.). The speech demonstrates a very clear understanding of some key aspects of Alexander’s work, including the recognition Tinbergen gives to the refined sense of observation deployed by Alexander teachers; the integral use of the hands as an instructional tool; and the challenge the pupil has to work against the grain (and strain) of everyday habits.

Here, however, we reach an impasse. Tinbergen chose to show a few ‘before and after’ photographs of people who had undergone some ‘physical’ changes through the course of Alexander Technique lessons. He also identified a number of physical, mental and even emotional benefits that he, his wife, and his daughter had experienced as a result of their individual tuition

(each with different Alexander Technique teachers). The role and ‘feel’ of the hands-on work, however, could not be communicated by Tinbergen to his audience, just as I am unable to directly engender those touch-induced sensations with the written word alone. Perhaps a fleeting sense is possible for some; a micro-sense at best, through the two prompts and related questions above.

Typically, in the one-on-one Alexander Technique lesson, the pupil is invited to receive hands-on support and guidance from the teacher, coupled with simple verbal instruction. The exchange is exploratory, open-ended, seeking more of the unknown lest we (pupil and teacher) continue to do what we are used to doing, reverting to habit, and type, and thereby thwarting the inherently experimental nature of experience and learning, and possible further variation/s. Alexander (1923/1987) sought to assist his pupils in the cultivation of their constructive conscious co-ordination and direction. This is a form of self-discipline and self-monitoring that (typically) allows the student to access the possibility of more and/or different thought and action, within and about themselves. It is the cultivation of this informed self that we pursue, more (or differently) equipped to recalibrate our psycho-physical co-ordination, perhaps also to increase the connections we feel with/in, and receive from, the world about us. The self-discipline, vigilance, patience, and willingness to maintain the experimental (as opposed to habitual) mode of experiencing, is akin to what Angelova refers to as a “pedagogy of radical self-reflexivity” (2014, p. 100). There is nothing self-indulgent or narcissistic in this disposition. On the contrary, along with orienting and sensitising ourselves to the affective (pre-individual) worldings shaping us from without, we have work to do to monitor and regulate the neuro-mentational, psycho-emotional, physio-anatomical (im)pulses working within.

The Angelova reference to a “pedagogy of radical self-reflexivity” comes from a review essay that references Hasana Sharp’s book on *Spinoza and the Politics of Renaturalization* (2011). Sharp notes how Deleuze’s reading of Spinoza “displaces anthropocentric moralities with ethics as ethology” (p. 201). Thus, rather than seeking guiding principles for (moral) action, we need to attend to our capacities for affecting and being affected by all other ‘bodies’ (human, animal, and other). We need to be less concerned with “internalizing a set of principles that will be valid for any occasion and situation” (p. 214), the better to pursue an “ethological ethics [that] becomes a sometimes unconscious, sometimes knowledgeable, praxis of entering into relations with other beings in enabling ways” (p. 216). Controversially, perhaps, Sharp argues the need, following Spinoza, to remember that “affirming ourselves as parts of nature is not tantamount to subordinating ourselves to Nature” (p.219). It could be argued that one of the practical consequences of hands-on Alexander Technique work is a recalibration of the (never-fixed) self-body-person (assemblage?) towards natural tendencies of co-ordination and direction. Learning and applying the principles of the Alexander Technique thus becomes a process of simple (yet challenging) auto-ethological inquiry whereby we simultaneously explore, experiment with, and become more kinaesthetically sensitised to the way we go about doing whatever it is that we habitually choose to do, or have done to us (including educational and ethnographic research).

Working on this paper produced a number of happy resonances, or coincidences, between my

personal explorations and applications of the Alexander Technique, and Spinozist/Deleuzian preoccupations with ethics as ethology. Duff (2014) refers to these Spinozist/Deleuzian preoccupations as “developmental ethology” (p. 53), and Gatens (1996) as “ethological evaluation” (p. 167). Bowden (2020) writes about “becoming the agent of the auto-development of the liberated potential that one is” (p. 384). Grosz (2017) too, notes the importance of ethology for elaborating an ontoethics that affirms “what a body can do...what degrees of movement and rest, intensify or diminish the capacities of a life” (p. 153). The fine-tuning, recalibrating, minor-key adjustments that take place typically in and through hands-on Alexander Technique exchanges are highly consistent with a conception of ethology as “a discontinuous process of becoming, rather than a linear record of the organism’s ontogenetic complexification” (Duff, 2014, p. 84). Such an auto-ethological process is one many of us have the capacity to consciously engage with, a capacity that ultimately relies on “an experimental ethos; even a lust for life” (p. 85). This is a process that takes place both in the course of our “everyday encounters” (p. 200), and in our work as ethnographers/researchers/educators.

### Concluding comments

Attempting to impart an actual experience of ‘Alexander Technique’ without the hands-on component is like trying to describe the taste of chocolate, or the sound of the sea, without the chocolate or sea being directly accessible. Elaborating a little on this analogy, the taste and sound would also depend on which chocolate and what sea and who, in particular, was doing the tasting or the listening, and under what temporo-spatial conditions. Yet, once we gain even a small sense of what the Alexander work can stimulate psycho-physically, then further kinaesthetic/proprioceptive and sense-making explorations might become desirable, and potentially fruitful. In this paper, readers have had to settle for the fleetingly sensed, the abstract, the anticipated, or perhaps the intuited. That aspects of the mode, atmospherics, and consequences of experimental-experiential inquiry particular to Alexander Technique teaching-and-learning have also been gleaned by researchers and thinkers in various related fields such as education, anthropology, philosophy, sociology, and human geography suggests reverberant sympathies, if not also ground for further exploration. It is not to make any claim for “one whole life of interconnected unity” but rather, to assume “an open whole of divergent and impossible potentials (Colebrook, 2014, p. 229). Such potentials might include an awakening to/of something other-than what we already know, think, sense, and feel as living creatures who, auto-ethologically, also choose to undertake educational/ethnographic research.

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