

As Yet Untitled

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Coming to the Alexander Technique from a dance background, I realize I was fortunate in two respects. First, that movement was and is my motivating force, and second, that through the study of T'ai Chi Ch'uan and Anatomical Release work, I had already come into contact with alternative ways of thinking about movement and dance from those of 'traditional' and 'modern dance' forms.

During the years that I have spent studying and exploring different techniques, ideas and ways of seeing and experiencing movement, it is the Alexander Technique, the T'ai Chi Ch'uan and release and improvisational dance forms that have had the most profound influence on me. It is primarily a synthesis of these techniques and their philosophies that I incorporate into my work, both as a dancer/choreographer and as a teacher of dance and the Alexander Technique. As these techniques have exerted their influence on me, they have also exerted their influence on each other.

They contain certain similarities in the way they look at and deal with the individual. These similarities are the essence of my work.

They all acknowledge that body and mind are inseparable.

They all acknowledge that each of us is a unique individual containing unlimited inner resources of creativity, and that the more fully we recognize and learn to use ourselves with awareness, the clearer and more powerful our expression can be.

They all acknowledge process and that all growth, all change takes time.

They all emphasize undoing — undoing habit, undoing preconceived ideas of body and mind to recover a natural freedom of movement and thought. Moving happens not through excess muscular tension, but through allowing the flow of energy to carry the body while toned muscles work efficiently.

They all stress the importance of being present, fully in this moment, aware, so that one can have the greatest freedom of choice. Ultimately, this is improvisation.

In all of this work, responsibility for change lies within each individual.

The T'ai Chi Ch'uan is a martial art and movement meditation. Deep concentration, the development of internal strength, circulation of energy along clear pathways within the body, allowing movement to be carried by the flow of energy, the union of opposites (eg. weight and lightness, deepening inward and expanding outward) are all aspects of the T'ai Chi Ch'uan that carry into my dancing and teaching. Gerda Geddes, my teacher, teaches the T'ai Chi as the physical manifestation of a symbolic, allegorical journey through life, from birth to death — image supporting movement.

I define Anatomical Release work as a way of experiencing anatomy through images, sensation and movement, so that anatomical information can become living and vital, and a deep physical understanding becomes possible. One approaches skeletal re-alignment and re-education of muscle patterning through the nervous system, through imaging changes within the body along very specific lines of action, while body and mind are in a quiet, receptive state (Ideokinesis). One is freed from unnecessary restrictions through release of tension, letting muscles return to a toned resting length as the body balances easily around the central vertical axis. This allows for the greatest range of movement. Integration within the body leads to a flexible relationship of parts. Balanced alignment is found through imagery not force. The natural progression from this experiencing of the body is into improvisation that rises from a deep, internal place.

The Alexander Technique is a body-mind re-education tool. Through gentle touch, verbal feedback and the thinking of directions within the body, awareness of one's kinesthetic sense is re-awakened and refined. One can recognize and relinquish habitual movement patterns that interfere with and restrict freedom of movement. Release of habitual tension into easy energy flow allows rediscovery of dynamic balance and dynamic movement within the body/mind. One can move with natural ease, flexibility and

integration. One underlying premise of the Alexander Technique, ‘the close connection between habit and an associated manner of use’¹ is essential in allowing the technique to work with any activity so that the activity can be executed in a more efficient way.

Beginning class sitting around in a circle, talking. So much to talk about. In the beginning, so many questions. Often, they’re questions that can’t even, as yet, be formulated — the students don’t yet know the words — it’s useful to hear others ask and tell. Concepts like: learning through unlearning; allowing; non-doing; doing less; waiting; receptivity; softness and strength can at first be filled with confusions, hesitancy and anger as well as with trust, recognition, relief and fully abandoned motivation towards movement. This talking feels essential, good.

This is a time when I will introduce the part of the body we will focus on — head, shoulder blade, heart, hip-socket, psoas, pineal — bone, organ, joint, muscle, gland — making connections in any way that feels right, within systems, between systems — floating skull plates, shoulder blades and pelvic wings opening in flight, heart rocked in hammock of thoracic spine curve, the ‘back and up’ of psoas and sternocleidomastoid muscles, joint spaciousness, glands as energy centers..... We look at many pictures and a three- dimensional skeleton. We talk, bringing up any information that anyone has relating to this body part. People love getting scientific, esoteric, specific, diffuse, universal, personal — the images surrounding the area expand.

Having looked at pictures, having spoken, with appetites whetted, we then dig in.

My dance students put hands on each other from the beginning, touching, exploring, feeling for bone, muscle, the shape of things — sensory information. They learn quickly. From not knowing what is being looked for, they soon become sensitive: to recognizing tension that is asking for dispersion; to direction both in their partner and in themselves; to energy flow; and perhaps most important, to their partner’s needs, and to giving space to let that need surface. My Alexander hands-on knowledge allows me to impart to students a subtle energetic quality of touch, and the concept of non-doing, the kind of touch where thinking translates through the hands into one’s partner. Putting hands on each other gives students important information in both directions. It is also a confirmation that the image is being experienced.

The Alexander directions are a constant, underlying all information, sensory and verbal, that I give students. Whole head moving delicately; torso lengthening, widening and deepening; elbows and knees away; fingers and toes lengthening — the expansion of inner space, a source and resource for movement. I ask students to look with microscope eyes — seeing parts in great detail, then, with new clarity, turn the telescope around — to see the whole falling together in unexpected ways. Having ‘seen’ and experienced a part differently, we can see ourselves, also, from a new and different perspective — one that allows for a letting go, that allows for greater ease, that opens new possibilities, new doorways into the unknown. “If it feels wrong, let it be wrong”, Bill Williams, my first Alexander teacher used to say. Most of the time, it feels so deliciously and unmistakably right, but sometimes it’s shaky, or terrifying, or just plain odd. As we integrate the part back into the whole, we are giving the Alexander directions greater detail, giving three-dimensionality, depth, to the Alexander length and width.

Moving on to simply walking, then running — sensing the touch of foot on floor, spreading toes, weight passing downward through the bones — the bony framework; organ content — weight within the body; lengthening, sleek muscles — an animal-like muscularity. I will introduce game structures that get students heated and excited, blood flowing through veins, feeling their own and others’ weight, (body weight to balance the Alexander lightness), exploring balance, bodies moving, sweating, breathing fast, breath supporting movement, energy streaming, a sense of play, forgetting to be careful. Simply enjoying moving. Getting tired. Too tired to hold on. Welcoming rest.

¹ p. 97 ‘The Universal Constant In Living’ F.M. Alexander published by E.P. Dutton and Co. Inc. U.S.A. third printing May 1942

All of this information is carried into improvisation via a time of stillness where each individual can drop deep within themselves, where imagery and the previously perceived sensory information expands understanding and experience. I let my students go to deep places, where conscious control is out of the way, no matter how constructive it may be. In these places of deepened experience, awareness is heightened — to be able to recognize habit, to be able to recognize what has replaced it, to be able to recognize an open doorway. “Sensation is the image”, a dancer friend, Lisa Nelson, says. I trust our sensing ability — the innate knowledge of the body to integrate if given an opening. A deeply knowing body, centered and internally quiet, can release into easy, efficient alignment and movement. Moving then rises from a deep, inner motivation and understanding.

Students are often amazed at how much movement they experience while lying still or moving relatively little through the space. This leads to infinite sensory and kinesthetic detail and richness when they are ready to move big. They are equally amazed at how easy moving does become — without exerting great effort, they are covering large expanses of space with large and expansive body movement. Moving seems to ‘happen’.

I encourage students to begin moving again by exploring the simple developmental actions of rolling, crawling, sitting, squatting, walking, running, falling. When simple moving is done with efficiency, care and ease, we lay a firm foundation on which to build. Complexity becomes a natural outcome. Simple actions, while experiencing weight, lightness and flow are taken as the movement base; internal image and sensation as the movement source.

My dance aesthetic is rooted in the Experimental Dance philosophy of the last twenty-five years, where all movement is permissible, including the most mundane, everyday ones, as long as the imagination can create it and the body can execute it. I therefore teach no specific style, there is no imposing of external shapes onto the body. Rather, I allow each individual to find their own way, while, at the same time, also learning from moving with other movers and from watching others moving. Each of us is built differently, have different forces moving us, will move in different ways at different times in our lives. I acknowledge that our bodies change as we grow older, and deepen in experience.

As I look around the studio, I am constantly awed by the variety and richness that emerges.

*opening space where movement can happen
discovery of movement
where movement doesn't usually occur —
where can your body go when this area of it is open to movement?
discovering and rediscovering and discovering again —
using each discovery as a stepping stone to further exploration —
can it lead you to where you have never been before?
Taking a step into the unknown.*

*resting and moving
giving yourself long periods of resting so that
pores of skin can expand, open,
cells can become
spacious,
breath can fill
the spaces*

We remember our habits cellularly. To ‘unlearn’, we need to touch into every cell.

moving as a continuation of giving way

spreading surfaces, both inner and outer

inner expansion able to fill with space, time, breath —

what does it feel like to fill with time?

what does it feel like to fill with space?

what does it feel like to fill with breath?

*allow an easy stretch to flow through the very center of the spreading
the very center of the giving way*

The body often desires to move in strange ways, into unfamiliar directions, unraveling itself with beautiful ease or torturous contortion. I am interested in following myself and my students to these places. They can help unearth creative possibilities that enrich the clarity of conscious direction. Emotion expressed through the body in movement and sound can be the most powerful motivator.

All explorers are courageous beings. I am moved as I watch my students explore, diving into new territories within themselves. This is where the work becomes most interesting for me. I watch students completely shaken up by the discoveries they make, guiding and watching them reconnect and integrate the new information both physically and intellectually — finding new strengths, new resources, greater internal support, greater self-sufficiency. I see them begin to be able to take responsibility for choices they make knowingly.

We are breaking ground — breaking up the students' known world — physical, emotional and thinking processes. The breaking apart of the known opens cracks that lead into more creative areas, opening them to research, exploration, the stepping, the daring to step into new territories.

A large part of breaking apart includes teaching ways to re-integrate that are more productive — new ways to create form. Students need to be shown ways to replace old forms with new support systems. Feeling the coming apart and the re-integration under my hands in the student's physical body, I know that it is a result of a change in their thinking, and that it reflects in their growing knowledge of themselves.

This dance training encourages each student to be constantly making their own creative choices through improvisation and awareness. Responsibility for change lies within each individual.

My own teachers have tended to be explorers, innovators, individualists. I feel quite free about using elements of the Alexander Technique and mixing it into whatever soup I happen to be cooking at the moment.

Each time I enter the studio, the elements shift, according to the time of day, quality of light, my sense of the people in the room and our needs — listening, and being open to what the moment presents — having an idea, but being open to changing. Improvisation — open to the possibility of stepping into the unknown. I can welcome the unexpected.

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Eva Karczag c.1992