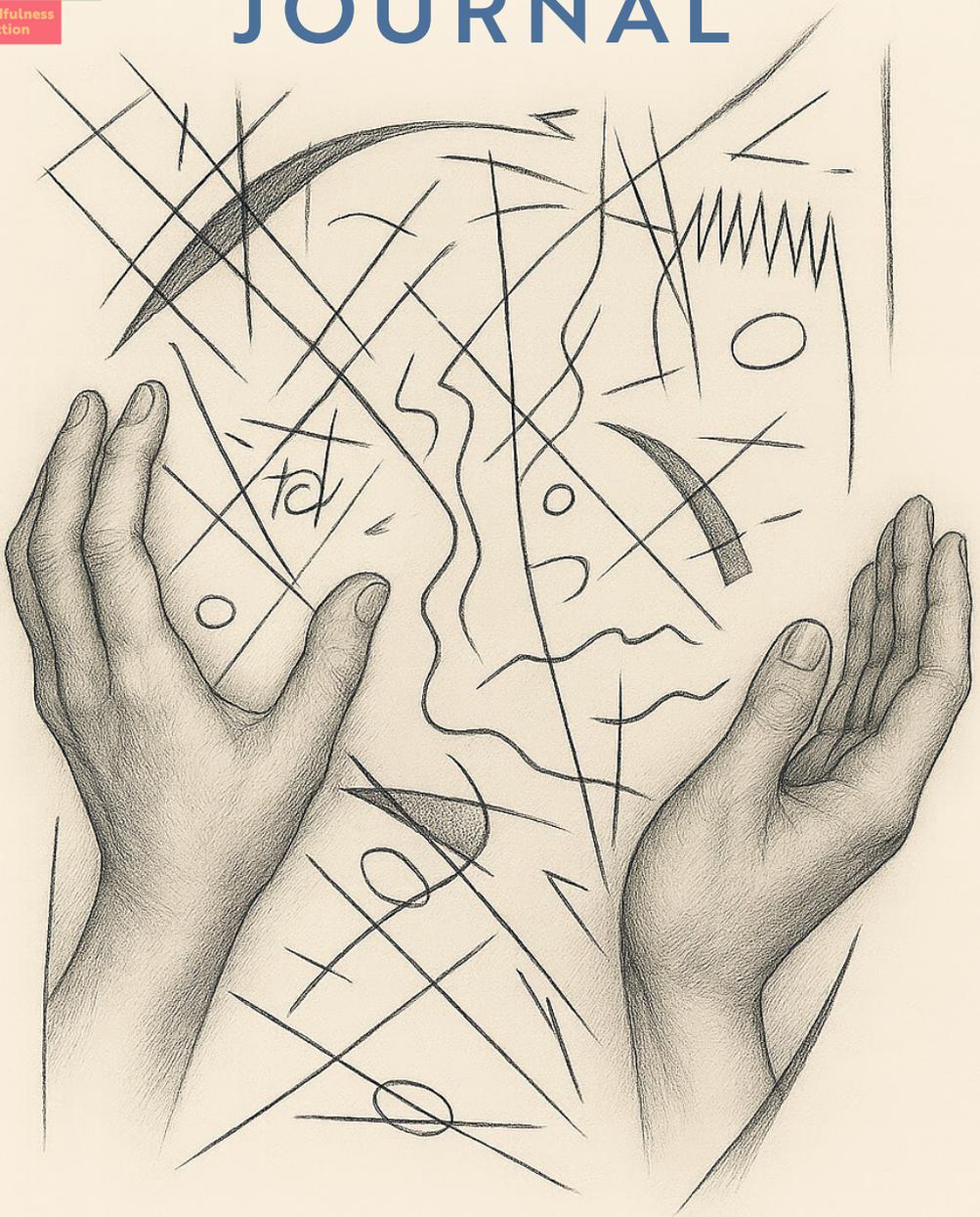




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Mindfulness
in Action

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To establish the Alexander Technique as a basic and recognized resource for health, productivity, and well-being.

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From the Editor

FRIENDS,

Photo by Gemma Davidson



As we prepare to gather once more for our Annual General Meeting, this issue invites a pause—a breath—to reflect on where we’ve been and where we’re heading together. It has been an honor to work on this issue. As we approach our meeting, it is refreshing to recall highlights from our last Convention, including Alice Olsher’s F.M. Alexander Memorial address, “[Letting the Work Develop](#),” while also looking forward to Sandra Bain Cushman’s upcoming speech.

In this issue, we feature “[The Power of Collaboration](#)” by Imogen Ragone and Ariel Weiss. Their Alexander Technique Teachers of Greater

Philadelphia (ATTGP) is a collective that supports teachers through collaboration, outreach, and education. Since 2012, they’ve hosted free annual online summits, attracting global participants to diverse workshops, fostering inclusivity, and raising awareness of the Alexander Technique. Monthly low-cost workshops further extend their reach, benefiting both local and international communities. Join them!

Gayl Forman invites us to consider the power of our speech in “[How Does Language Support the Concept of Thinking of Oneself as a Whole Interconnected Self?](#)” Language plays a crucial role in the Alexander Technique, shaping how we perceive ourselves and our connection to others. Thoughtful word choice enhances the teacher-student relationship, supporting holistic awareness and alignment with the core philosophy of the Technique. Mindfulness in communication enriches the practice for both teachers and students. How might the way we speak shape how we see? And how might that, in turn, shape how we teach?

Lori Shiff, Ariel Carson, and Nanette Walsh from RIAT (Riverside Initiative for the Alexander Technique) offer stimulating keynotes on “[Letting the Work Develop](#)” that explore the nuanced relationship between intelligence and creativity and how these traits overlap and diverge. While intelligence is often associated with logic and knowledge acquisition, creativity thrives on generating novel and original ideas. Though related, the two are not synonymous: creative breakthroughs can arise independently of IQ. The authors emphasize that cultivating creativity means nurturing curiosity, openness, and diverse experiences—virtues that strengthen both intelligence and imagination. They remind us these are not competing qualities, but overlapping ones, each expanded by a willingness to dwell in the unknown.

Sandra Bain Cushman reflects on her lifelong work in music in “[Looking Backward—and Forward!](#)” Robert Fripp’s Guitar Craft, founded in 1985, integrates the Alexander Technique to develop what he calls “the guitarist inside,” emphasizing discipline, presence, and silence. Alexander teachers—led by pioneers like Frank Sheldon—work closely with Guitar Craft participants to release tension and heighten awareness, often using hands-on group work within the guitar circle. Many who began as musicians in these courses later became Alexander Technique teachers themselves, drawn by the powerful blend of self-awareness and musical rigor. This environment fosters deep experiences of silence and presence that support both artistic expression and personal growth. Practice becomes a holistic, embodied process.

Finally, we have a beautiful report from Richard Brennan, “[Discovering for Yourself](#),” on the Alexander Convention in Slovenia, which unfolded among mountains, conversations, and shared direction. His account reminds us: our work reaches across borders, time zones, and ways of knowing.

Poise,
Joe

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How Does Language Support the Concept of Thinking of Oneself as a Whole Interconnected Self?

GAYL FORMAN

Author's note: Below is an opinion piece emerging from my personal experience. I write from the viewpoint of myself as an Alexander Technique teacher and from my experience as a student, both of the Alexander Technique and dance.

LANGUAGE IS A POWERFUL OUTGROWTH OF THINKING, the fuel of the Alexander Technique. As a manifestation of thought, the words we choose matter. Language is an articulation of our thoughts into a communicable form.

Just as thinking, and by extension, language, affect how much or how little we “do,” so what we say, to ourselves both inwardly and outwardly, expresses how we understand our connection to ourselves and others. The words we use can foster conceptualizing oneself as either an integrated or disintegrated being.

When I interact with my pupil using possessive adjectives—for example, “your” arm—I convey my respect for my student’s ownership of themselves and therefore their agency. I demonstrate my confidence in their selecting what works best for them from the myriad of choices that appear while navigating through new experiences. All of this is encapsulated in my use of a possessive adjective. It is truly amazing how powerful is language! Self-responsibility, fundamental to the Alexander Technique, sprouts. Buds of empowerment blossom.

If I use the definite article, for example, “the” arm, I communicate that my pupil’s arm works separately from the whole of them. Is “the” arm unmoored, floating around somewhere? To whom does “the arm” belong? Does this not run counter to the philosophy of the Alexander Technique, a practice in which envisioning oneself as a whole person is integral?

Assuming my hands are simultaneously speaking to my student's totality, I create a dilemma. Which of my diametrically opposed instructions should be followed?

Describing my pupil's arm as if it were divorced from them is confusing. If they were to follow my verbal instruction, they would consequently be bound to perceive themselves from an outside view, potentially becoming a passive observer. Furthermore, they might misapprehend and believe that detachment is necessary to the practice of the Alexander Technique.

When I interact with my pupil using the definite article, I objectify them and encourage them to dissociate. I teach them to view themselves as a specimen within which exist disunited parts. Especially for those students already encompassing a holistic self-conception, I plant seeds of discomfort, perhaps culminating in alienation, especially on a deeper level. Our circuit of energy is broken, gone is a conversation-like flow.

Studying dance and the Alexander Technique, I wish my teachers would address me with possessive adjectives, such as "your" arm. However, one of my dance colleagues feels differently. She prefers being taught with definite articles, which she finds "neutral." I wonder whether this usage better defends against her emotional experience. During dance class, especially when mirror work is used as a tool to hone technique, definite articles very well might encourage objective distance. Seeing one's reflection in the mirror often is an overwhelming stimulus. When faced with it, I, like many others, guard against negative self-judgment by employing detached, analytical self-observation. I concentrate from an outside-in perspective, disregarding my relationship to the sights and sounds of my surrounding space. The unintended consequence is disconnection; one symptom is glazed-over eyes.

Conversely, in the absence of mirrors, a dancer's total aliveness is brought into play. For example, the work of pioneering choreographer Anna Sokolow requires honest and deep internal motivation. Full integration of body, mind, and spirit encompasses her art. Not surprisingly, she worked without mirrors, or, when necessary, covered or turned us dancers away from them. As to her teaching language, possessive adjectives predominated. In one fell swoop, "your" arm reminded me then and now of myself as a whole, my individual notes finely tuned in concert with each other to create one voice.

Like sowing a seed in fertile soil, watering it, and watching it grow, mindfulness of our speech feeds us teachers and deepens our practice, and so too, that

of our students. As I practice being “present,” my self-nurturing transfers to my pupils, then back to me again, a continuing cycle between us. Appropriately replacing definite articles with possessive adjectives is yet another opportunity to enhance our command of awareness, *inhibition*, and choice. Internal life clearly manifests outwardly and is one of the most extraordinarily beautiful experiences of teaching the Alexander Technique.

NOTE: The possessive adjective “your” is *implied* by simply saying the noun and the action. For instance, “arm lengthens.”

Seeds of this opinion piece were planted when, as a student of Kitty Merrick Wielopolska (a member of F.M. Alexander’s first training course), I was admonished for referring to myself with the definite article rather than a possessive adjective.

About the Author

M.AmSAT certified and RIAT (Riverside Initiative for the Alexander Technique) certified Alexander Technique teacher.



“AT for All” (introductory Alexander classes nominally priced,) assistant, substitute, and virtual class series teacher, RIAT. Guest teacher, 14Y and Sirovich. Experiential presenter, Gilda’s Club, Stuyvesant Town Community Center, 14th St Y, and Sirovich Center, NYC.

Alexander Technique Teacher Training began semi-privately with Lydia Yohay then moved on to an AmSAT certified teacher training school. Hiatus for stage-four cancer treatment, during which time studied weekly with Lydia Yohay one-to-one. Returned to complete teacher training at RIAT with renewed passion. “Art of Breathing” post-graduate workshops, Jessica Wolfe. Early lessons began with Kitty Wielopolska (first-generation teacher), Missy Vineyard, and Lydia Yohay; studied on and off with Yohay for the following forty years.

Dance background comprised of an introduction to several forms (ballet, modern, Duncan, folk) as a child at the Philadelphia Dance Academy. Adolescent years saw Cecchetti ballet as foundational, under the tutelage of teacher Elaine Wilson. Dance major, SUNY Purchase, a program of Choreography, Ballet and specific forms of Modern (Cunningham, Graham, Limon) as well as Anna Sokolow works, performance pieces she personally taught and directed. In an effort to carry on with Limón under Jim May, moved to the City, subsequently landing an apprenticeship in Mary Anthony's company and simultaneously discovering the Lynn Simonson [Jazz] Technique, 1984–2017, including completing the Simonson Teacher's Certification Course, 2005, resulting in gig as beginner jazz class substitute. While studying choreography with Anna Sokolow, performed as a member of the Diane Jacobowitz Dance Theatre, with whom Anna Sokolow was guest artist. Assisted Ellen Robbins, children's choreography teacher at Dance Theatre Workshop, privately assisting students in setting their choreography, which led to team teaching nursery school in addition to position as Dance Specialist teacher.

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Looking Backward—and Forward!

Forty Years of the Alexander Technique in the Guitar Circle

SANDRA BAIN CUSHMAN

ROBERT FRIPP, founder of Guitar Craft, writes in his book, *The Guitar Circle*:

Learning to play the guitar in the context of the Guitar Circle is a way to develop presence.¹

Guitar Craft and the Guitar Circle

Robert Fripp's Guitar Craft began in March 1985 at Claymont Court, a stately, early nineteenth-century building located in Charles Town, West Virginia. Since that time, Guitar Craft has held courses of varying lengths on four continents over four decades. The Alexander Technique has been a supporting spoke in the Guitar Craft and Guitar Circle wheel since the beginning.² Many of us who have been a part of both the Alexander Technique and the Guitar Circle communities have joined together in this article to address these two questions:

- 1 What does the Alexander Technique bring to Guitar Craft and the Guitar Circle?
- 2 What does Guitar Craft and the Guitar Circle bring to the practice of the Alexander Technique?

1 Robert Fripp, *The Guitar Circle* (Panegyric in association with Discipline Global Mobile on behalf of the Guitar Circle, 2022), 22.

2 "Guitar Craft is a way of developing a relationship with the guitar, with music, and with ourselves. The Guitar Circle is a way of working with others. This is our practice." Robert Fripp, guitarcraft.com, home page.



The Guitar Circle, Glen Cove, NY 2022. Photo by Sandra Bain Cushman

This article begins with Frank Sheldon’s thoughts about his years in the Guitar Circle (GC). He was the first and foremost teacher of the Alexander Technique in GC during its early decades. The article continues with the reflections of many of the teachers who joined Frank, first as assistants or trainees and later as instructors in their own right. There are also narratives from those who arrived at courses as musicians to participate in work with the guitar, experienced the Technique in the context of the Guitar Circle, and then went on to become Alexander Technique teachers and GC instructors.

From its inception, GC has incorporated sitting practice, division of attention exercises, and group circulations (which will be described later in this article) along with the Alexander Technique in order to develop what Robert now refers to as “the Guitarist Inside.” This sounds a bit mysterious, just as descriptions of the Technique may sound mysterious to the uninitiated. As for what is “taught” in Guitar Craft, Robert describes the work of Guitar Craft and the Guitar Circle this way:

[It's] the development of a personal discipline, that we may hold ourselves present and quiet, that Silence may more fully enter us and become part of who-we-are.³

The Alexander Technique in the Guitar Circle

Through the four decades of GC's evolution, Robert has invited an increasingly large team of Alexander Technique teachers to courses. Even with a sizable team of us in residence, the challenges of teaching the Alexander Technique in the Guitar Circle are daunting. Most individuals arrive eager to play guitar and have no clue that in this community, guitar playing has as much to do with work on the Self as it has to do with work on the guitar.

The challenge is often immediate and urgent. In Glen Cove, New York, in 2022, sixty beginners showed up for a course just as the pandemic was coming under control. Halfway through the first day, Robert stopped me in the hallway and implored, "Please! Can you teach everyone to sit?"

Colossal tasks require fresh attitudes, new approaches, on-the-fly adaptations of teaching forms. The Alexander Technique teachers associated with GC are fully certified by the Alexander Technique Affiliated Societies (ATAS), and while many innovations have been developed in this unique environment, our work remains grounded in the integrity of our training.

We will now enter the Guitar Circle.

Frank Sheldon (Seattle, Washington, United States)

In 1985, I lived near Claymont Court, located in the West Virginia panhandle and about a two-hour drive from Washington, DC. All early Guitar Craft courses were held at Claymont. One day, I heard that Robert Fripp, who conducted these courses, would like to speak with me. Two or three years before, I had met Robert when he attended a residential course for the Alexander Technique at Claymont. I was teaching on this along with several other AT teachers.

³ Fripp, *The Guitar Circle*, 23.

During lunch at the Claymont mansion, Robert asked me about possibly teaching the Alexander Technique on this Guitar Craft course. The reason for this became apparent when he spoke to me about a problem that would be familiar to any teacher of the Alexander Technique: He would show a student the mechanics of a specific technique on the guitar, and the student would proceed to do it differently from the way Robert had demonstrated. Yet the student would either be oblivious to this, or perhaps even worse, believe they were doing it exactly how they were shown! Robert indicated that he was competent in teaching guitar but not so much in dealing with this issue. I immediately knew that there was a place for the Alexander Technique here, which meant there was the possibility that I could be of use. I said yes to becoming part of the staff of Guitar Craft.

There was only so much time to work with course participants individually, but I ensured that I got to everyone as much as possible. I still wished I could do more, however. One day, on a later course, while the participants were having a group class in the early-nineteenth-century ballroom, it came to me that I could try essential *hands-on* while they were playing. I went in and found them seated in a large circle facing in. I saw that entering the circle would be too distracting, so I walked around the outside.

These people had all received at least one private session with me, so I hoped it would not be too startling. I worked on each one by using my hands and direction in a way that was as *non-doing* as I could manage. This seemed to bring most of them a little back to themselves, that is, the self that is so easy for most of us to forget when we are caught up in something. I was surprised at how effective this seemed. Some could let go of at least some unnecessary tension and come up a bit while their shoulders released down. Others simply started to breathe again! The experience of letting go while in the middle of a demanding activity can be invaluable because it creates a bridge between a lesson and the actual demands of our lives. For others, no, they could not let go, yet many of them would come to me later, having been shocked to realize how locked in they were to their habits and unnecessary tension. I felt this was at least equally valuable because we all have to “begin where we are.”

I did not see working in the circle as a substitute for a one-on-one lesson but rather as a complementary process. In the same vein, I also began to employ some “games” during part of my Alexander Technique group classes on GC courses. The Alexander Technique’s basic principles may be simple, but they

can be subtle and even bewildering. Of course, our habit of wanting to grasp and grapple with something new to understand it is an obstacle in and of itself. Coming at the principles from another angle, where everyone could participate as they could, seemed to be a valid use of the limited time available.

Some of these games are known to almost everyone, for instance, the classic Simon Says, which is perfect because it shows how if all our energy and attention go into gaining an end, we may lose ourselves in the process, which will then defeat achieving our end. Other games came from the theater world, and many I made up. The essential elements I wished to highlight were *inhibition*, self-awareness, and the experience of choice. Out of this would often come the revelation of how much our habits come into play, including in ways that no longer serve our best interests. These classes had a creative feel that seemed welcomed by most, as it was a chance to play differently. Of course, it also offered a little break from the challenging demands of the guitar classes and practice, which went from early morning until late at night.

“Perfect is the enemy of good.”

I am sure I could not reach everyone, but I am confident that I reached more than a few. I know some participants sought out Alexander Technique teachers after their course. Others have told me how valuable it was to them. Time well spent for all, I hope, and certainly for me.

Kim Cary (Massies Mill, Virginia, United States)

It is February 1986. I am sitting in a circle of guitarists as a note is moving around the circle, passing from one guitarist to the next. I am bracing myself. *It's heading my way! Will I play the right note at the right time?* The pressure is on.

Some notes are full and present. Some are missing, or only partially sounded. I am watching. Waiting. Bracing. Another note is moving around the circle and heading towards me.

I feel the presence of someone patiently standing behind me. I feel the arrival of gentle hands on my shoulders. *Wow!* I was so involved and focused with anticipating the next note, I didn't even realize I was so tense.

My shoulders sink. I let go. Someone has my back. I feel my feet on the ground, my seat on the chair... and my vision takes in the whole circle. I am breathing.

Thank you, Frank Sheldon, for introducing me to the Alexander work.

Twenty Years Later

After completing my training to become a teacher of the Alexander Technique, I am now the one who is standing behind a guitarist in the circle of guitarists. Taking in the space of the circle. Breathing. Listening. Being with the music. Back in my back. Sharing this awareness and experience of solidity and freedom with the guitarist seated in front of me as the creative impulse continues its movement through the circle of guitarists.

Cathy Stevens (Kirchdorf am Inn, Bavaria, Germany)

My very first Guitar Craft course in December 1989 in Grosseto, Italy quite simply changed my life. Shortly after I arrived in the cold monastery that was to be our home for the next six days, I met Frank Sheldon, who gently guided me throughout the week in my role as his Alexander Technique teaching assistant within the context of a Guitar Craft course. That week of working with Frank was a complete privilege and a joy that I will never forget.

Although I had been teaching the Alexander Technique both in England and Spain for over six years, I had mainly taught the Technique in the form of forty-minute private lessons, with the addition of workshops and work on Technique teacher training courses. This Guitar Craft course, with nearly a hundred participants—many of whom had never even heard of the Technique—presented me with the need to work differently from the ways that were familiar to me.

It all felt a bit overwhelming at first, but I soon found that there was enormous support for the work from the course as a whole, from the example of Robert and the experienced students—who had all already received a considerable amount of Technique work and who visibly used the principles in their lives and as the basis of their instrumental technique—to the whole way in which the course was structured and conducted.

For me, a major factor in this was that “stopping” seemed to be the basis from which all course activities proceeded. At the beginning of every meeting with guitars, for example, once the players were all seated in the usual circular formation, there would be a short period of silence before the guitar instruction or group playing began. In this way the principle of inhibition was constantly reinforced throughout the day.

Because of the circular seating formation of the group, Frank and I were able to work on the students from behind during this period of stopping and continue once the instruction and playing began.

I found that the nature of the circle work with guitars placed demands on the students that encouraged the opening of awareness, which for me is an essential part of the process of *direction* in the Alexander Technique. Although during the six-day course each student had a maximum of three or four short private sessions with either Frank or me, as well as a Technique group class every day, with inhibition as the basis of all activities (including kitchen and housework), the level of receptiveness to the work on the part of the students proved to be unusually high. I soon became aware that far more was possible, on many levels, than I could have possibly imagined.

But what really floored me completely then and continues to now are the Visitations of Silence. That’s the only way I can describe my experiences.

Although not a stranger to sitting in silence, the Silences that arrive and hold the whole company speechless and almost motionless (often at mealtimes or during meetings of the whole course) are of a depth, power, and beneficence that in the beginning, I had never previously experienced. It’s not that we stop as a group as a result of a verbal or tacit invitation to do so by a group leader; it’s rather that we are stopped in our tracks by the Presence of Silence.

It felt completely blissful: I had “come home”—I am still home! And I experience more clearly and tangibly than ever before the vast world of creative intelligence, power, and benevolence that the intentional act of stopping makes available and can give us access to. Help is then available to guide our activities and thinking, and offers, in my experience, the source of the solutions to the complexities that currently face us all.

Mariela Cárdenas (Zurich, Switzerland)

My Alexander Technique life took a big step forward in the Guitar Circle context and the circle work. I realized from conversations with Robert Fripp that just the Alexander Technique presence is teaching. Robert once said to me, “When you are walking through the corridors, you are teaching.” In the GC context I could feel that my presence was a reminder to participants on the courses.

The presence in the circle work is a magical energy and support for the Alexander Technique work. It connects me to myself, to the other people, to the room, and to the universe in a special way that I have not experienced before. That intensity in the connection with ourselves and to others seems to connect through the music. My Alexander Technique work, my hands, flow through the room in a natural and spontaneous way, “in time in tune,” like the guitars playing.

I can relate *inhibition* from the Alexander Technique to the Silence I experience in the GC context. When Silence arrives, these inner questions automatically arrive with it: *Where am I? Where is my attention? What am I doing right now?* This Silence is the opportunity to reconnect with ourselves—releasing tension, releasing thoughts.

The importance of the intention and commitment in the GC work—the circles, meetings, kitchen work, morning sitting, work in the house—is a support for our Alexander Technique work. The holistic process in the work, and the consequent transformation of the body, seems to deepen in the Guitar Craft setting.

Pia Honold (Munich, Germany)

I came into contact with Guitar Craft—and the Alexander Technique—in 2000. I had played classical guitar as a child and teenager, but after going to university, I had nearly stopped all musical endeavors. The GC courses in the beginning felt somehow frightening. There were lots of strange people. We played in a completely new tuning. I began using a pick for the first time.

At that time in my life, I had a habit of feeling small and incapable and being terrified of making mistakes. And then in all this overwhelming newness, there was one person (or sometimes two) who were just there. They walked from

person to person and touched delicately. And suddenly there was no more fear. Suddenly it felt like it was “OK” to be me. Safe. Whole. Connected. Alive.

These people were called “teachers of the Alexander Technique.” I had never heard of this technique before. I was completely puzzled. There were also group classes in the afternoon. And on some days there was the possibility of getting a ten- to fifteen-minute turn (if you were fast and lucky and wrote down your name quickly enough on the note at the pinboard!).

I could not intellectually understand it, but I had an experience in my body that something fundamental was going on. I could also hear it in the music when the teachers worked with others.

I believe that the benevolent and accepting attitude in the courses made it possible and safe enough for me to get involved in the experience without having to understand it beforehand.

Being immersed in these experiences—playing guitar, working in the kitchen, even cleaning the toilets—and being encouraged to experiment with the Alexander Technique principles in all these situations along with others doing the same was life-changing.

My fascination for this “freedom to change” was so strong that I went on an Alexander Technique training course from 2004 to 2007 in my hometown of Munich. I have kept in touch with GC and enjoy the privilege of being part of courses as AT instructor. I experience in the GC group settings that the Alexander Technique has a subtle but substantial influence, not only on the individuals, but also on the functioning of the whole. If I am in touch with myself, I can more easily open my ears (and my heart) to others and respond to what is necessary. I think that we can make ourselves available also to other groups of people with common aims (not only guitar players) to share the experience and practice of a non-doing quality.

I want to thank especially my first teachers in the Alexander Technique: Cathy Stevens, Sandra Bain Cushman, Frank Sheldon, Mariela Cárdenas.

Giorgia Casmirro (Abruzzo, Italy)

The Guitar Circle is where I first experienced the Alexander Technique. I was a conservatory student in Italy, but I had never heard anything about it there.

My introduction to it came during my introduction to the Guitar Circle, and it came through direct experience in activity, while playing in the circle in a specific form called *circulation*.

In a circulation, a group of people sit or stand in a circle, with guitars (mainly), and the first instruction they respond to is to play one note and pass it around—each person contributing with one note or gesture to a whole-group motion unfolding.

Back to my first experience:

I'm sitting in the beginner circle and we are circulating. Suddenly I become aware of my back, my whole back, and the space behind and around me as if from a different and utterly new point of view and observation. I can feel the touch of two hands on my back—the quality of this contact I can describe as warm, gentle, open and opening, breathing, whole, safety-giving.

From here, now, I can connect to my body: it is more than a stiff, rigid collection of bones and flesh holding a guitar. I can stop trembling and begin to release. My body re-finds space and volume, and my awareness expands.

This shifts the point of view from doing something—like playing a note when it is my turn—to participating in something that is flowing and unfolding. This participation has the quality of doing as little as necessary: I can see the motion of the circulation and hear the passage of sounds, and I can see that I don't need to do anything but be there and then let the needed acts involved in playing a note happen.

I feel that the experience of the Alexander Technique quality is amplified by the Guitar Circle, and at the same time, Alexander work is reflected in the circle—the quality of participation, the note, is passed fluidly from person to person. The principles of the circle work and the principles of the Technique speak to each other in a very natural way.

The circulation in itself is a form that can show quite immediately how everyone is an equal and necessary part in the emergence of a whole, and that to let it flow, you need to let go of unnecessary tensions, and in doing so, by necessity and also quite naturally, it begins to open a view beyond your habitual self.

When I later trained as an Alexander Technique teacher I began to see more specifically how this experience of non-doing/flow/participation/performance

manifested in the circulation is also brought about by Alexander Technique principles and can be found within the self.

My experience of the Alexander Technique from the beginning is intertwined with my experience in the Guitar Circle, and today they both keep nourishing my practice as a human being, musician, and Alexander Technique teacher.

George Porter (Berlin, Germany)

Those remarkable hands! That sense of presence, care, and support! This was my first experience of an Alexander Technique teacher on an “Introduction to Guitar Craft” course in 2005. We were a small team of people working together in a circle with a guitar instructor presenting exercises. The Technique teacher visited us in turn while we played—making us aware of new possibilities inside ourselves, new ways to interact with our instruments, paths to less tension and ease. Up to that point, I had never considered my posture or how the state of my body might be influencing my playing. Now, I was shocked to have overlooked this! It made perfect sense!

A few days later, I arrived at a personal meeting with a tense wrist. The teacher took my hand and the tension melted away. It was magical!

I know from many fellow GC colleagues, or “Crafties” as we are known, how impactful the Alexander Technique has been for them too—on a personal level concerning posture, unnecessary tension, pain, and even emotional issues, but also when we play and perform together—thus raising the quality of our collective presence.

After that course in 2005, I immediately took personal lessons. I was hooked! And it went beyond the guitar. In 2014, I graduated as an Alexander Technique teacher and have had the privilege of instructing on a number of GC courses since then. In this role I have offered Crafties traditional chair and table work, but also provided Technique-based guidance in guitar circle work, as well as group instruction in guided lie-downs and movement. The latter has become a feature for so-called “orchestral” work, known as the Orchestra of Crafty Guitarists (OCG). This is where Crafties move, play, and perform in guitar orchestras with as many as a hundred people or more.

I have also offered Technique classes online as part of GC's "At-a-Distance" courses, where I devise a series of Technique-related themes as ongoing support for participants in their guitar work and daily life between the residential courses.

Jacek Kaleta (London, UK)

I was introduced to the Alexander Technique during a Guitar Craft course. We were sitting in a circle with our guitars when the teacher stood behind me and offered a gentle touch on my back. It felt respectful and non-invasive, and I immediately noticed a qualitative change in my experience—a sort of melting away of effort. I'm naming it in hindsight; at that moment, it just felt welcomed and good. I was hooked right away.

I find that the Guitar Craft courses provide a very rich and rewarding environment to work in. GC students are trained in cultivating an alert and attentive presence, which prepares them exceptionally well to receive Alexander Technique input. In general, I've found GC practitioners to be more open and receptive to the work's touch and thinking than the average musician might be.

Another rewarding aspect of working in the GC environment is how supportive and inspiring it is for my growth as a Technique teacher. Every time I work on the course, I make exciting discoveries and developments that carry my Technique work forward.

The Guitar Craft context allows for varied modes of teaching: (1) one-to-one sessions with or without the guitar, (2) offering educative touch to students while they're practicing in a circle—this is more non-verbal work, (3) providing constructive thoughts at the beginning of rehearsals to set guitarists up for more coordinated and efficient playing, and (4) group sessions without guitars to explore the principles of the Alexander Technique in stillness and movement.

The principles of the Alexander Technique are embedded in the Guitar Craft approach, as reflected in its two teaching aphorisms: "We begin by doing nothing; then, we move to doing something," and "Address the process rather than the outcome; then, the outcome becomes more likely."

Erin Wigger (Los Angeles, United States)

Orchestra of Crafty Guitarists (OCG) performances are almost entirely improvised. Imagine fifty to a hundred plus musicians moving in unscripted ways around a performance space. They might form a large circle around the audience, surrounding them in 360 degrees of sound, or fall into a line that snakes its way through the room in endless iterations as guitarists join and break off—walking, running, and passing notes.

The potential for unique forms of musical expression, play, and gesture in these performances is limitless, but there is also hazard. Headstocks collide, feet trip, cues can be missed, or the musical potential of the moment isn't met. A lot can go wrong when a group this large works without a net. Thankfully, we arrive with tools.

Every OCG event is an opportunity to apply the group's work from the previous week when individuals from around the world gather to eat, sleep, cook, clean, perform, rehearse, and engage in practices (including the Alexander Technique!) meant to hone the attention and increase our capacity for presence.

Below is one experience (of countless impressions, insights, and observations over the last sixteen years of my involvement in Guitar Craft) that continues to nurture, inspire, and instruct my Alexander Technique practice. It changed how I view the potential of our shared work:

It is May 25, 2013, OCG performance in Hadley, Massachusetts. There are moments of musicality and flow at this show, but also difficulties. The space is awkward to navigate. Its shape seems to work against us. I wonder if others in the group, like me, are feeling we have failed to achieve lift-off. But then I hear the recessional notes begin, and I move with the team from my place into a line with Julia at the head.

We play the same pattern of notes separately and together, overlapping to create a rich harmony as we are led out of the sanctuary (the performance is in a church) and into the atrium, which is dark and separated from the audience by glass. Julia walks a circle around the outer edge of the room, her circle becoming a spiral until we are all inside, shoulder to shoulder, filling the atrium's high ceilings with sound, turning gently.

Suddenly, we are no longer guitarists walking in a circle, playing notes in a room. We are a galaxy of stars. We are each of us drops in an ocean of sound.



On the previous page: Orchestral Maneuvers at the 7th meeting of the Orchestra of Crafty Guitarists, St Marks in the Bowery, May, 2013. Photo by Sandra Bain Cushman

The quality of our work, our attention, our collective Aim has led us to this moment, yet we are not its authors. I receive it like a blessing. It feels like grace.

Looking at my fellow guitarists as we pass each other in the spiral, there is an unmistakable recognition that something magical, beyond us, more than us, is in progress. I don't just see it with my eyes, I feel it with my whole body—the uprightness of individual presence, of collective work, of communion with one another and with Silence. This is not the Upness achieved by thinking or even sensing and releasing; this is the Upness of being.

In this moment it is clear. We are not just a mask of personality traits, muscles, bones, organs, fascia, our cultural history or personal psychology. We are not just the product of a world whose suffering brings us down, shrinks us, hardens us, and dims our lights. We are also spirit. Our bodies, our two feet, connect us to the earth, but we have the capacity to reach for what is highest in ourselves. We are upright. This is our heritage, an expression of our humanity.

In this world, as we find it now, what could be more important than work that has the power to help us rediscover, possibly even restore, the dignity, value, and fullness of our own humanity?

Ignacio Gracián (Buenos Aires, Argentina)

Thanks to Guitar Craft courses, I learned about the Alexander Technique in 1999. And it has now been ten years since I became a teacher of the Technique.

From the beginning, both worlds nourished and continue to nourish my relationship with my Attention, my Sensitivity, and my Freedom.

Thanks to my Teachers, Merran Poplar and Robert Fripp!

Thanks to the Teachers of my Teachers, Walter Carrington and Elizabeth and J. G. Bennett!

Thanks to the Teachers of the Teachers of my Teachers, F.M. Alexander and G.I. Gurdjieff!

Ignacio acknowledges the legacy—his personal history alongside the generational succession—of both the Alexander Technique (left column) and Guitar Craft (right column).

The Future

While the Orchestra of Crafty Guitarists continues to thrive (the next OCG course, fully subscribed, takes place in Castione della Presolana, Italy in April 2025), new approaches and new forms evolve. The full scope of GC and GC-related projects is featured on the Guitar Craft/Guitar Circle website: guitarcraft.com. Click on *News* and *Schedule* for upcoming events.

Sandra Bain Cushman (Charlottesville, Virginia, United States)

The pressures of large-scale improvisation, complex repertoire for more advanced guitarists, and public performance are real. The intentional challenges posed in a Guitar Craft course and in the Guitar Circle—sitting practice, division of attention, “Stop” exercises, the invitation to Silence, along with countless hours spent on guitar and rhythm exercises while running the kitchen and doing the housekeeping—require Alexander Technique teachers to mediate individuals’ habits in the face of a large constellation of stimuli.

How do we engage in all of the things that Guitar Craft and the Guitar Circle have to offer without triggering dysregulated nervous systems, *end-gaining*, performance anxiety—some of our many habits that interfere with individual and group flow and freedom?

Orchestral Maneuvers (OM) arises from and is based upon the integration of Alexander Technique principles and practices with GC forms. Orchestral Maneuvers came into being during a US East Coast Tour of the Orchestra of Crafty Guitarists in 2013. It builds on Frank Sheldon’s work, with whom I trained at the Virginia School for the Alexander Technique in the late 1980s, and on my own participation in over forty GC projects.

Orchestral Maneuvers exists partly because I, as a teacher of the Alexander Technique and non-guitarist, have a burning desire to join circulations! This personal yearning is equalled by a compelling professional desire to invite

musicians to put aside the guitar as the primary stimulus during some circles and introduce “lesser” stimuli that do not vie for dominance with the Technique. OM circulations are adapted to include non-musicians *and* the audience; they are designed to bring thinking in activity to the forefront, following the Technique’s “choices” set out by F.M. Alexander in *The Use of the Self*.⁴

During a circulation, the participant has three choices: to do the thing, to refrain from doing the thing, to do something different.

Chairs are set in the circle, or in walking forms they are scattered throughout the room.

Those deciding to be the audience, to “refrain from doing the thing,” take an audience chair; these are placed inside the circle where the sounds and rhythms form a kind of sound bath.

Those deciding to participate in the clapping, counting, or moving rhythm stand (for walking forms) or sit in the circle (for sitting circulations). They begin by “doing the thing.”

The third choice comes about during pauses, moments when the whole group stops and all participants are invited to inhibit and direct. An effective form for exploring direction in the circle, the Five Relations, is the foundation of the Alexander Technique in OM.⁵

The option is offered again and again to swap over from the audience chair to the player chair, or from the player standing position to the audience chair, to “do something different” from what you have been doing (or to re-decide to “do” or “not do”).

Christina Fleming (Charlottesville, Virginia, United States)

As a voice instructor, I have hosted recitals for fourteen years. For most of that time, the recitals’ format was traditional. The students performed and the audience listened. For the past few years, I have opened every voice recital for my students with a few circulations that include our audiences. This shift

4 F.M. Alexander, *The Use of the Self* (1932; reis., Orion, 2001), 46.

5 Sandra Bain Cushman, “Dynamic Balance and the Five Relations” *AmSAT Journal*, no. 15 (Summer 2019); “Dynamisches Gleichgewicht und die Fünf Beziehungen” *ATVD Infobrief*, no. 72 (März 2019).

has been transformative. Now, both the performers and the audience become aware that they are in this moment together. It's beautiful to witness everyone in the room actively and intentionally drawing energy from one another and creating a shared experience.

Christina's innovation resonates with Robert Fripp's most recent writing about the Guitar Circle:

The presence of conscious and creative contributors raises the frequency level, and provides opportunities for those fixed in their attitudes/behaviour to directly experience a very different way of doing things: [e.g.,] where an undertaking comes to life in and from itself, where the performance itself wishes-to-be.

To know that this as a reality changes how we operate, even to redirect the course of our lives. Our station, immediately, remains the same. But our higher-frequency experience, our change of state, gives us the taste of what real life, real engagement in living, may be possible for us.⁶

NB: An Orchestral Maneuvers workshop will be available to participants at the International Congress in Dublin, Ireland in August 2025 in conjunction with Robert Fripp's Keynote Address.

About the Author

SANDRA BAIN CUSHMAN graduated from Cornell University in 1977. She attended the Virginia School for the Alexander Technique under the directorship of Frank Sheldon and qualified as an Alexander Technique teacher through STAT (Society for Teachers of the Alexander Technique, London, UK) in 1990. Sandra has been a member of the American Society for the Alexander Technique since its inception.



Photo by Laura Dillon

6 Robert Fripp, "Collective Engagement. Within the Performance Event," <https://guitarcraft.com/collective-engagement-within-the-performance-event>, September 2024.

Sandra has taught the Alexander Technique at the Contemplative Sciences Center, the McIntire School of Music, and the Meriwether Lewis Scholars program at the University of Virginia, as well as in elementary schools and in a three-year continuing education initiative for public school teachers. She led a 1600-hour AmSAT-certified teacher training program, Safe Space Together (SST), in Charlottesville, Virginia, from April 2021 until June 2025.

Sandra's collaborative approach to teaching arises from presenting the Technique at more than forty courses for Robert Fripp's Guitar Craft over the past thirty-seven years. She is a former member of the Judith Leibowitz Scholarship Committee and was longtime chair and co-chair of the Membership Committee for AmSAT.

The Power of Collaboration

Building An International Online Summit

IMOGEN RAGONE & ARIEL WEISS

ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE TEACHERS most commonly train in groups and then go on to work in relative isolation as solo entrepreneurs. In 2012, Philadelphia area Alexander Technique teachers formed a collective that has helped to connect and support local teachers while building stronger bridges to the outside world. We are members of this group and the benefits of this collaboration have proved to be far greater than we ever imagined.

Alexander Technique Teachers of Greater Philadelphia (ATTGP) was formed in 2012 as a consortium for local teachers. The founding dozen or so members were interested in meeting regularly to exchange work and ideas, share resources, and feel connected to the local teacher community. Right from the start, membership has been open to all Alexander Technique teachers. In-person monthly exchange meetings are hosted on a rotating basis by members, something that temporarily switched to a completely online format during the time of Covid.

As part of our collaboration, we have provided outreach in the community, with introductory workshops at an REI store and at the Philadelphia Flower Show, as well as offering continuing education opportunities for our members by bringing in visiting teachers, both online and in person.

In response to the pandemic, ATTGP launched their first International Online Alexander Technique Summit in October 2020. The inspiration for the summit came from a desire to find a way to leverage the internet to foster interest in the Alexander Technique while in-person teaching was not an option. We followed a simple premise: offer a week-long platform for people to attend a variety of Alexander Technique workshops free of charge. The initial offering was such a resounding success with almost 500 people participating from several different countries and continents around the world that it has now become an annual event.

The summit has grown over its five-year history; in January 2024, it hosted twenty-three workshops with over six hundred people participating from all over the world. The feedback from participants has been robustly enthusiastic. In addition to exposing new folks to the Technique who otherwise wouldn't have access to it, the summit has also become a place for our peers and colleagues to gather, explore, and learn from each other. An important feature of the summit is that the sessions are welcoming and accessible to all students—from absolute beginners to those who have been studying, or even teaching, for many years.

One unique aspect of our process is not only that we collaborate to produce the event, but also *how* we collaborate—the *means whereby* of our collaboration. Our organization's membership is open to all Alexander Technique teachers, and each member has full agency to teach how they choose. Because our summit is not affiliated with any specific Alexander Technique societies, the breadth, diversity, and crossover of teaching styles has been a hallmark of the event. The members of ATTGP volunteer to present workshops, provide technical assistance for other presenters, and attend each other's presentations.

Creating a supportive and open culture for ATTGP members impacts the summit by building events that highlight inclusivity and diversity—there is innate permission to explore for participants and presenters alike.

Another key way we build a culture of inclusivity is by offering the entire week of events free of charge. This creates accessibility for anyone in the world with an internet connection, no matter their socio-economic, cultural, age, or ability parameters. Presenters volunteer their time and expertise with the support of ATTGP. Member presenters gain exposure through ATTGP's promotion of the summit, leading to many positive outcomes for their individual businesses, in addition to strengthening our local Alexander Technique community and creating more awareness of the Technique around the globe.

Alexander Technique Teachers of Greater Philadelphia has further leveraged the momentum built by the Annual Online Summit by adding a monthly series of low-cost online workshops. This initiative brings consistency to our programming and online presence while offering many more teaching and exposure opportunities to our members. Most importantly, they provide a low-risk opportunity for continuing study for our growing audience.

Ultimately, the Annual Online Summit has proved to be a rewarding and successful endeavor for our communities both local and global. By coming together to share our resources, time, and talents, we have created a space to

draw new interest in the Alexander Technique from around the world. It has strengthened our own connections locally and globally, supported continuing education for our members and our colleagues, and helped grow our own individual businesses. By modeling this cooperative and inclusive project, we hope to encourage and inspire future projects that can build bridges to connect our communities to the world.

Our most recent summit took place the week of January 20 through 25, 2025 and was another great success. We are already making plans for the next one, to be held in January 2026. You can find information about the summit and sign up to be informed about this and other ATTGP events at alextechgreaterphila.com/online-alexander-technique-summit/.

We'd love to have you join us.

About the Authors

IMOGEN RAGONE (Alexander Technique Training Centre in Charlottesville, VA [ATTiC] 2006) is a founding member of ATTGP and also serves as its administrator. Imogen is based in Wilmington, DE, and works with her students individually and in groups, both in person and online. She specializes in working with women who are dealing with chronic stress or trauma. More information at imogenragone.com.



Photo by the author

ARIEL WEISS (Philadelphia School for the Alexander Technique, 1988) is a founding member of ATTGP and an ATI Sponsor. She has been teaching AT in Philadelphia since 1988; previously, she trained teachers at the Philadelphia School for the Alexander Technique and co-produced the Freedom to Make Music Conference. Ariel teaches online and in person at the Curtis Institute of Music, the University of Delaware, and Crosslands retirement community. She coordinates a wellness program for surgeons at Children's Hospital of



Photo by Micah Gleason

Philadelphia. Her TEDx talk, “Posture Myth-Busting: It’s Easier Than You Think,” was released in 2021. Ariel is pleased to serve as co-site coordinator for the 2025 ATI Annual Conference and will also be a Continuous Learning presenter at the 13th International Congress in Dublin 2025. atphila.com

Discovering for Yourself

Fourth International Alexander Teachers Convention Report
Kamnik, Slovenia 25th to 31st August 2024

RICHARD BRENNAN

THE FOURTH ALEXANDER TEACHERS CONVENTION was inspired by the previous year's gathering, as people remained thirsty for more in-person, hands-on events. As in 2023, the 2024 Convention was held in the beautiful medieval town of Kamnik, Slovenia. Situated in the foothills of the High Alps, Kamnik boasts two castles, colorful streets lined with artisan shops, and, on the outskirts of town, a fully renovated monastery with onsite accommodation, where many participants stayed for a reasonable price or discounted group rates.

It was the smallest convention so far, with forty-three people from fourteen countries—Australia, Croatia, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Serbia, Sweden, the Netherlands and the USA. The atmosphere and the gelling of the group was nonetheless extraordinary: even though the participants were from so many different countries, by the second day everyone felt totally at ease with one another. The opening talk with Niall Kelly set the tone for the week, as he introduced nine experienced facilitators from very different backgrounds and training. This was followed by dinner at a wonderful Arabic restaurant in town. I saw that everyone was talking and working together with an eagerness that I had never experienced before at any other Alexander teacher event.

The group was treated to a week of warm, sunny days and blue skies: many of the workshops and exchanges took place outside in the courtyard or large garden, which had incredible views of the Alpine region. Each day began with some Alexander-based yoga from David Moore, Rossella Buono, and Kecia Chin, followed by a continental breakfast with fellow teachers. After breakfast, the whole group met in the open-air courtyard to choose their morning workshop. Topics included scoliosis, stress, performance anxiety, and how to

introduce the technique in groups; there were other workshops for musicians and people doing yoga. Whatever the topic, there was always a sense of ease and fun in the learning.

After lunch at the local café, a few minutes' walk away, everyone gathered in the large garden to exchange work, either one-to-one or in small groups led by one of the participants, who all had a lot to offer. There was also a small workshop for those that still felt uneasy about putting hands on a teacher more experienced than them. The rights and wrongs of putting hands on soon disappeared as everyone gained more confidence. At 5 PM, there was a lecture: topics included applying inhibition and direction in yoga with David More, helping those with back pain and scoliosis with Kecia Chin, "Pathways to Choice" with Tommy Thompson, and "Change your Thinking" with Niall Kelly.

As in the previous year, the group went on a day excursion high up into the famous Velika Planina plateau of the Alps. Once again we were fortunate to have Žiga Repanšek, a wonderful and experienced, local guide from Kamnik. The group left the monastery after breakfast at 9:30 and walked into town to catch the bus to the mountains. After the short twenty-minute bus ride, we arrived at the bottom of Velika Planina, where we all boarded the cable car to take us up 1,500 meters into the High Alps. Then, after about an hour's gentle walking, we arrived at one of the mountain cafés and were treated to a typical shepherd's lunch followed by the famous large portion of apple strudel. After that, the whole group decided that a session of constructive rest was needed before the visit to the museum and journey back to the monastery.

Overall, there was a keen interest in working with instrumental musicians as well as increasing awareness of Alexander Technique teachers forming networks of connectivity, and creating future opportunities to work together. It was easy to see the newly graduated teachers' confidence growing hugely during the week, and equally good to see teachers gaining international support, as this enthusiastic community continued to grow even after the convention ended. The whole week was filled with fun, laughter, learning, and unlearning: it was obvious that the participants emerged at the end of the week with renewed enthusiasm, greater clarity, and more confidence to teach the Technique—as well as many new friends!

2024 Comments

Here are some comments from the participants from this particular group:

“Wonderful Alexander community strengthening”

“Very inspirational! I met lots of new ideas that I want to explore more deeply.”

“Inspiring, encouraging- I realized that I knew more than I thought!”

“Joyous place and people. I really learned a lot of practical knowledge that I can implement into my Alexander practice.”

“I came away with more confidence as an Alexander teacher.”

“The most exciting AT Convention yet!”

“Inspiring and I leave full of new ideas.”

“I am so grateful to have been able to spend a week with such lovely people”

“Refreshing...motivating...encouraging.”

“Great exchanges and expanding learning.”

“I have learned more about my body and how I can listen and be more in tune with it.”

“A truly wonderful experience—such available people. I could see clearly that it was such an amazing week for everyone.”

“I received very intensive insights of myself! Thank you also for the warm welcome and hands-on work despite not being an Alexander teacher yet.”

“There was a lot of variation in the program, but it did not feel overwhelming.”

“I was rejuvenated in body and soul...wonderful week.”

“Great people, great setting, great workshops, great atmosphere!”

“For me this week was a great encounter with known and new colleagues. Lovely atmosphere, wonderful workshops and lots of learning. Please repeat.”

There was so much positive feedback that we have decided to repeat the convention either in 2025 or 2026. If you are interested in either year, please email Richard Brennan at info@alexander.ie.

alexanderconvention.com

About the Author

RICHARD BRENNAN (Alexander Technique Training Centre, 1989) trained with Jeanne and Jorgen Haahr and Paul Collins in Devon and Somerset between 1986 and 1989. He now travels internationally giving talks and courses on the Technique. He was a director of the 2015 Alexander Congress in Limerick and is the organiser of the 2013 and 2017 Alexander Teachers Conventions in Dublin. Richard has written eight books on the Alexander Technique, which are translated into twenty-two languages and are on sale worldwide. For the last twenty-two years, he has been the director of the only STAT-approved Alexander Teacher Training College in Ireland. He is a cofounder of the Irish Society of Alexander Technique Teachers (ISSAT).



Photo by Ralf Hiernisch

Letting the Work Develop

AmSAT ACGM Keynote 2024

NANETTE WALSH, ARIEL CARSON & LORI SCHIFF
Riverside Initiative for the Alexander Technique

July 11, 2024

Nanette Walsh

I'D LIKE TO FIRST THANK CHRISTOPHER [NEVILLE], who initially reached out to us. I am so grateful for everything you've done and for the work of your ACGM Team. Many thanks to Lisa DeAngelis and the Executive Committee; and to Hanif and Stephanie (cool as cucumbers through this), the AmSAT Board and its extended committees, the training-course directors, and all the dedicated AmSAT members who have done so much to get us all to this point tonight. Good job! We, the Riverside Initiative for the Alexander Technique (which we fondly call "riot," R.I.A.T), are so honored and grateful to be here at this particular moment.

I'd like to begin by asking you all for a "show of hands"[regarding the impact of COVID 19 on this community]:

- 1 Who here had to close their teaching practice for some extended period of time, and/or had to weigh whether they could teach, or train, with the welfare of someone vulnerable who was close to them?
- 2 Who here turned to online teaching and found it was more effective than they thought it would be?
- 3 Who here had moments when they swore to never teach another online lesson again?
- 4 Who had deep concerns about touching people again and/or struggled with the constant changes in hygiene protocol and contact exposure procedures?
- 5 Who found refuge and encouragement in their local and/or national communities?

- 6 Who here taught at educational organizations that did not get a reset but rather had to pivot quickly to Zoom, while carrying unnerved students through the existential challenges of the pandemic?

Just from these few questions we can see that our teaching community has been deeply impacted by the last several years. And we are still here! We are a resilient bunch! We are Alexander teachers, we are still here, and in this historic moment—the first in-person ACGM after a pandemic—we are testimony to what it means to be a heroic community. I borrow that concept from my friend Rick Tarnus, founder of the California Institute of Integral Studies. Though ultimately ours is a solo journey, we cannot carry a vision that's distinct from the current conventional worldview forward on our own; it takes communities of people to do that.

Heroic communities are by nature flawed—that's, in part, what makes them heroic: despite their flaws and failures, they continue. So, what binds them, then? It may not be that everyone always feels welcome or even that they belong, yet there exists a deeper bond—a shared fidelity to a greater good—like a deep water table that we all draw from, where we meet, are sustained, and retrieve ourselves individually and collectively.

It is these kinds of heroic communities, and our need for them that now, more than ever, give me hope. And that's what I intended to form when I formed RIAT ten years ago, and then six years later its umbrella nonprofit organization, Sapiientia Initiative. The word *sapiientia* comes from the Latin verb *sapere*, which means to taste, to know something by tasting it, ingesting it, becoming it. It's a kind of participatory knowing that is greater than just a body of knowledge. So, in January 2020, Sapiientia Initiative became the operating foundation for RIAT. Consider that date for a minute... January of 2020... and all that it meant. That's when I aimed to reinvent RIAT under this new umbrella organization. I had no idea how much of a reinvention that would mean.

The underpinnings for what's currently RIAT were present at its formation—in many ways RIAT was forged out of adversity. When the pandemic came, it was just a lot more intense fuel on those early refining fires, and it was ultimately that experience that has most powerfully influenced where we are today. So, I'm going to address the questions Christopher sent us, especially in light of the last four years.

The first question:

- 1 What are the specific ways you have developed your teaching and presenting of the Alexander Technique to remain relevant and effective in the twenty-first century?

From its foundation, RIAT was centered around the truism that breathing and moving well are a birthright, not a luxury. This truism seems to need community, on the ground, to bring it into being. F.M. Alexander, being an autodidact and the one-time “darling” of the progressive education movement, was in a way a prime example of the beginning of education becoming a bit more democratic, more down to the ground, out of the ivory tower.

Practically speaking, on the training course that means we value teaching that is grounded in experience. It means meeting the moment where it is, the students where they are, honoring their individual needs and autonomy, learning from them, and basically rolling up our sleeves and seeing if we can help them along on their particular journey. None of this is likely going to be new to any of you—this is all fundamental to the Technique. I believe we all value that movement from the known to the unknown. And that demands that we remain grounded in the moment and relevant. The challenge is to be continuously true to this inherently progressive movement, *and* not lose sight of the Technique’s history and lineages—not water down the powerful and specific practices passed down by Alexander and the first-generation teachers.

For me, that means endeavoring to make the past present,¹ every day, especially on the course. That can be a pretty deep dive since making the past present, even owing a great deal to Alexander, predates Alexander—right? Wasn’t it Aldous Huxley who said something like *when an investigation comes to be made, we will find that we are doing everything as it is done in nature when the conditions are right, except we are learning to do it consciously?*²

- 1 To make the “past present” is akin to the rediscovery of “perennial truths” as anthologized in Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy* (New York: Harper, 1945).
- 2 The full quote is F.M. Alexander’s: “When an investigation comes to be made, it will be found that every single thing we are doing in the Work is exactly what is being done in nature where the conditions are right, the difference being that we are learning to do it consciously. See F. Matthias Alexander, *Aphorisms*, ed. Jean M.O. Fischer (London:

Running a training course, making the past present... or maybe I should say the best of the past present... requires holding multiple dynamic tensions inherently together: rigor; structure; discipline; strong connection to the teachings and writings of FM and the first-generation teachers; critical thinking; and deep adaptability; all while supporting the individual needs and journeys of each trainee, and new teacher, as much as possible.

So, while our curriculum is fairly structured, it's a living process that is constantly evolving. For example, the Hands-On Group curriculum that was originally passed down from Dilys Carrington has evolved a great deal—its near constant evolution is often the result of needs and conversations within the community; or sometimes a response to new scientific understanding illuminating something that has traditionally been rather mysterious. Some examples [of this are]: exploring gravity as distinct from ground reactive force or matching force or paths of weight as related to but distinct from lines of force [or an exploration of] “spiralic” lines of force as they relate to the midline and that seem to have remarkable similarities to Eastern somatic disciplines and their circular arcs. Or reimagining how we teach a classical procedure—for instance, what was previously known as “monkey” [was] renamed for oh so many good reasons many years ago now, on the spur of the moment, on the course together coming up with ODAF. It was originally a bit of a joke, but it stands for Oppositional, Dynamic, Attitudinal Framework. And it stuck; the trainees picked it up given the absence of racist connotations and the useful combination of concepts.

On a practical level, each week I send an evolving Hands-On curriculum and Glossary of Terms to every teacher and volunteer on the course. My aim is to use the most relevant and helpful language possible to make intelligible the developmental learning and teaching of hands-on skills at RIAT. We do the same with directed activities—originally called “games” at Lansdowne Road, they are organized group learning and teaching activities that typically build on each other over the course of a year. Our cycle of games has broadened out to meet the interests and current activities of our trainees, like using a cell phone while employing the basic dynamics of hands on the back of the chair. The most recent adaptations to our directed activity/game cycle are increasingly

Mouritz, 2000), 88. No citation could be found for Huxley quoting Alexander, though it would not be surprising for him to do so on this subject.

integrating them into our weekly Breath and Voice curriculum and Integrated Anatomy. In the meantime, we offer occasional deep dive modules for Breath and Voice and Integrated Anatomy several times a year.

Making the past present also means taking on Alexander's writings, even those from the early 1900s, and attempting to illuminate what is essential to our work while allowing for time to acknowledge the harm that racism and erroneous evolutionary theories continue to perpetuate. To help trainees who find reading FM difficult, outdated, and/or offensive, we sometimes approach his writings horizontally... that is, using Mourtiz's wonderful compilation of quotations of key Alexander concepts. So, for example, we'll read everything FM ever wrote on "sensory appreciation," starting with his earliest writing, and then ask the trainees to come up with everyday language for the principle and present it in a mini-lesson.

Staying relevant at RIAT means we are committed to staying in conversation with modern science. Shortly after RIAT's formation, Dr. Rajal Cohen presented a condensed version of a Research Methods class she was teaching at the University of Idaho, and which she has now offered on three occasions to the course. It feels especially crucial now to be able to discern real science from pseudo-science. A couple of years ago, we hosted, along with Molly Johnson's course, the first thirty-four-week AT and Science pilot program for training courses, with Drs. Tim Cacciatore and Patrick Johnson. More recently we highlighted the scientific roots on which modern Alexander Technique science has been built—[we held] an event honoring Dr. John Austin and his important study with Pearl Ausubel demonstrating striking results in the efficiency of breathing and then connected it up to a bit of the science that has been built on it. We have a nice video of that, and a trailer on our website,³ if any of you would like to see it.

Before I move on to the next question, I'd like to highlight something that makes the Technique's relevance often so difficult to communicate, which is that it addresses so many apparently polar expressions of what it means to be a fully alive human being: the Technique is both rooted in and engenders a deep quiet, the ability to be calm, mindful, and at ease; *and* it is dynamically strong, it is powerful, and it is skillfully adept at engaging with the world. Often people

3 For close captioned trailer and full video of the event, see sapientiainitiative.org/honoring-dr-john-austin-the-science-of-the-alexander-technique/. —Ed.

gravitate towards one pole or the other. And we know from current science that someone who is focused in on themselves tends to lose ability to skillfully achieve acts outside themselves—for instance the ability to hit the target when throwing a dart at a dartboard. So, I am super interested in how the Alexander Technique develops dual awareness—interior and exterior, the kind that can be found in skilled martial artists, the kind that engenders power that does not rely on force but [still] results in greater flexibility, strength, readiness, and resilience, resources increasingly needed in our world. As Caren Bayer would say: We are training Jedi warriors.

Also of note, on this theme, there is a forthcoming paper that is of great interest by Drs. Rajal Cohen, Patrick Johnson, Gabrielle Minnes-Brandes, and Victoria Door. It clarifies what the Technique has in common with mindfulness-based practices, and how the two are different. Given AmSAT's current motto and the popularity of mindfulness-based practices,⁴ this is an important paper for us.

The second question:

2 What are the innovative approaches you have implemented to make the Technique more accessible to a wider audience?

We are training unique individuals with unique needs, challenges, and gifts, especially now with an intense need for flexibility given the overwhelm so many are encountering. And though we provide a pretty structured training, I want our trainees to become their own teachers, with their unique skills and talents, who will ultimately reach the communities and individuals with whom they most resonate.

To this end, I have two strong, wonderful, and very different women, as my associate directors: Ariel Carson trained with me at ATNYC and has been with RIAT from its beginning. She is also a much sought-after Somatic Experiencing® practitioner and trainer assistant; Lori Schiff joined us at RIAT a few years later and was one of my first teachers at ACAT. She has been teaching musicians at the Juilliard for the past thirty-four years. Both women are part of the senior faculty, as is the amazing Caren Bayer, teacher of thirty-nine years who, as many of you know, trained with [Patrick] Macdonald and ran her own course

⁴ The motto is Mindfulness in Action.

for thirteen years. Having an independent but supportive senior faculty who work in support of the structure of the course enriches all of us and inherently broadens our reach. The senior teachers are joined by a wonderful and diverse group of teaching assistants and volunteers, each bringing their beautiful, unique selves into the course, making for an exponentially rich and diverse environment.

As far as specific innovations go, from early on RIAT has used Google classrooms and video recordings. It began with the need for a flipped classroom in 2017, wherein materials and recorded presentation were posted before the in-person class. We were exploring how a new grad, who was moving, could stay connected to teaching on the course and [how to] continue to help build the Embodied Anatomy curriculum. In the current online teaching universe, flipped classrooms are widely used, but then it was quite new.

So, in March 2020, when Covid was quickly spreading in New York City and lockdown was on the horizon, we were able to pivot to Zoom and Google classrooms fairly easily. That spring, we often ran seven classes a week just to keep everyone as connected as possible. And we ran a series of classes through the summer that were also open to the public while I was doing the build-out for our new space in the city. So, with a very rigorous and dynamic hygiene protocol in place, we opened our doors for eighteen trainees in September 2020.

Especially for the last four years, those of us who have dedicated our lives to the Technique at RIAT have known the power of it to help regulate our nervous systems, increase resilience, improve neuromuscular coordination as well as our ability to breathe, enhance our well-being, and transform our lives.

How do we connect this powerful transformational practice that benefits us so much and in so many ways with the person who does not know about the work or have any reason to believe it can help them? This is the eternal question for the Technique, but it is more important now than ever, lest we see the Technique, as we know it, disappear.

Again, I'd like to highlight the role of modern science, which frees us from outdated jargon and outdated theories. I'm especially interested in modern pain science now because, on some level, pain is the great equalizer. Though a great deal more research needs to be done, current modern pain science not only shows the efficacy of the Technique to reduce pain, but more and more it is pointing to the how and why the Technique works. This is truly exciting, because by understanding how and why we reduce pain, we begin to

understand the specific mechanisms at play in how the Technique enhances well-being—by looking at what goes wrong, we see how we are specifically enhancing what goes right. So, I am super excited about hosting the monthly Modern Pain Science Webinar with Dr. Tim Cacciatore and Mari Hodges on our course during the upcoming school year. It'll run once a month and will give us all plenty of time to dig into the depth and breadth of this important information. It will be open to the general Alexander Technique community, and we hope other training courses will join us.

The third question:

3 What are the success stories you have witnessed first-hand due to your unique approach?

Sapientia prioritized safe gathering for teaching and learning during the pandemic, at a time of great isolation; and that priority continues today. Since the start of the pandemic, we have safely seen eighteen trainees through to graduation without a single case of contact spread to this day. This might be the success of which I am most proud. Two of our grads are also JLSF [Judith Leibowitz Scholarship Fund] recipients; a significant number of our grads are working at higher education institutions; some are building their own private practices, generating social media followings; and many are assistant teachers and volunteers on the course and/or “AT for All” teachers... and I'll explain what that means later—not that much later—don't worry!

Our earlier success with the flipped classroom stood us well when we ran hybrid portions of classes six days a week. We still use this hybrid method for anatomy and our reading discussions and directed activities. Our recordings ensure that everyone can stay abreast of theoretical information as well as participate in group activities, if they must miss class. We also recorded all the guided lie downs, with which we start each day, so that trainees could tap into them in need.

That first summer after the vaccine arrived, [the] Broadway [theater community] had planned to open in the fall, and we ran a series of classes that offered scholarships to help performing artists get back to work. That series hosted a broad group of teachers. We saw somewhere between forty to fifty new students come through the door to attend classes that summer, often more than once.

With our hybrid abilities, we ran events all through the pandemic, our first being our graduation of three trainees in June 2020 in Central Park, and our most recent being the “Science of AT” event honoring Dr. John Austin... recorded and now fully captioned. Did I say you can find that on our homepage WeGoUp.org? We’ve come a long way since our June 2020 graduation on a hill in Central Park!

While new technology helps us reach broader and more diverse populations, there is no substitute for hands-on teaching. RIAT has always had a Community Outreach Program, and in the last year especially, now that we are out of triage mode from the pandemic, with the support of our admin team, our Community Outreach has grown exponentially. In the past year we transitioned from doing general intro classes to asking the teachers what they were interested in teaching and to whom. Since then, our “AT for All” class enrollment has increased fourfold. So, all total, so far this year, “AT for All” teachers have taught ninety-four private lessons—and counting!—and twenty group classes, two of which were offsite in the communities where people live and gather. And we have five more “AT for All” classes yet to come this summer.

“AT for All” benefits the training course as well as the public. Trainees have the opportunity to observe or assist on “AT for All” group classes. We subsidize an honorarium for the teachers and provide free rental—which is especially helpful for the newer teachers—and we offer mentorship if it’s wanted. Also, “AT for All” applicants for private lessons provide practice students for third year trainees’ supervision. Among last year’s “AT for All” student participants, several have pursued an interest in training, one of whom we recently accepted for fall admission.

The last question:

- 4 What are your recommendations and insights for other training programs seeking to modernize and expand their reach?

I would not presume to suggest what another course should do. Training courses—and their directors—are as varied as we are as a country, and one training-course director should take great care when making any recommendations to another course. For example: what might be good for an urban course, in a city like New York, will be different from a smaller, more rural course without another course nearby for hundreds of miles. Each such course

will have very different needs and considerations from one that has multiple competing courses in the same urban center.

That said, I think any course can benefit from incorporating modern scientific understanding—for all the reasons that I’ve already outlined and more.

And with *that* said, I’ll offer this question, which comes from a grant application we recently submitted: What are the barriers and solutions to having your mission reach the public? Each training course will likely have its own barriers and therefore its own solutions. So, for instance, if part of my mission is to make the past present, the barrier is that doing so involves depth work—it does not “scale up.” The solution, for me, is to stay close to the thread of what is most important and alive in me, and curious about what is most alive in the trainees. And when we can follow those threads, they ultimately lead us to that same deep water table—the place where we collectively retrieve and revive ourselves and can then, with the support of our heroic community, act with fidelity to the greater common good.

About the Author

NANETTE WALSH, M AmSAT, MFA, MA is the founder and director of RIAT (Riverside Initiative for the Alexander Technique) teacher-training course (2014 to present).

Previously, Nan co-directed Alexander Technique New York City. Nan is also the founder and executive director of RIAT’s umbrella nonprofit organization, Sapientia Initiative Inc. (2020). As a director of training, she has graduated over sixty certified teachers.

Nan is author of *Unsmudged: An Encounter with Peggy Williams, a First Generation Teacher of the Alexander Technique* (2018). She trained at ACAT and received her teacher certification in 1995, and subsequently undertook extensive post-graduate work in London with first-generation teachers Peggy Williams and Walter Carrington. Nan holds an MA in Psychology and Systematic Theology from Union Theological Seminary (2021) and an MFA in Art Media Studies from Syracuse University (1982).



Photo by Joseph Guinta

I'D LIKE TO START by posing a few questions to you on this lovely evening.

- 1 How do you sense or register your own aliveness in this moment? Give yourself a few beats to be with that sense.
- 2 How much of your whole being can you allow to participate in that noticing?
- 3 Now, can you simultaneously sense your own aliveness along with the aliveness of the other folks in this room?

There is something in each of us that knows how to grow, and we are unified by this equitable force. First-generation teacher Margaret Goldie called this our “growth processes” and said to “let It grow you.”¹ Whatever is breathing and growing you is the same thing that's breathing and growing all of us. I'll give a few more moments to sense how we are all animated and connected by whatever we choose to call this force.

Tonight I also invite you to consider how you support your students to access their aliveness or vitality. Alexander Technique teacher Ed Avak told Nan [Nanette Walsh] that as he makes hands-on contact, he sets out to “hunt for the lively thing”² in himself and his students. I'm certain that each of you already has your own unique means to help your students access their lively things. Let's also notice how the principles and means of the Alexander Technique simultaneously connect us in an undifferentiated manner, just as they flow through each of us uniquely.

This is an exciting time for somatic educators. “Somatic” has become a kind of buzzy term, and it speaks to the body-mind-spirit unity that Alexander Technique teachers have been cultivating since the beginnings of our work. To let our work grow and branch out while maintaining its integrity amidst this somatic revolution means that we have to ensure that our roots are nourished and strong, and that there's space for them to deepen and spread. I'm embarrassed to say it, but in some moments of frustration with the work over the years, I've clocked some cocky adolescent impulses to throw the Technique

1 Fiona Robb, *Not to 'Do': An Account of Lessons in the Alexander Technique with Margaret Goldie, July 1995 to November 1996* (London, Camon Press, 1999).

2 Ed Avak, phone conversation, July 2024.

out all together and start over as if *I* most certainly know better. However, now that my hair is starting to grey, I've come to recognize that any hope we have of expanding the reach of the Alexander Technique further has to include the roots of the work. Our growth processes are stronger through conscious awareness of our personal and collective histories and origins.

Nan remembers Walter Carrington at the Oxford International Congress distilling the Technique down to two essential questions that we can ask ourselves: Where am I now? And where do I want to go? As we embody these questions within our individual somas, we can also explore what they mean for the "body" of work that is the Alexander Technique. Where is the Alexander Technique now? And where do we want it to go? To understand where we are now is to understand where we've come from... our roots. Just as you were developed within a particular context that informs who you are today, the Alexander Technique was also developed within a particular context.

When I co-authored the "Undoing White Supremacy in the Alexander Technique" (Carson, Einstein, MacDonald, White-Ayón, 2021) document in 2021, we were attempting to illuminate an element of the soil in which the Alexander Technique was grown, and in which it continues to grow today. Many of you joined me in the monthly meetings that followed to explore that document in depth. In there we quote Rev. angel Kyodo williams: "One of the most powerful things that white folks can do is just call themselves white." Race is a construct, but because it is one that is so pervasively accepted, acknowledging the Technique as a historically white-bodied practice can help us understand more about how it was developed. What has been passed down in the way we teach and embody the Alexander Technique that is influenced by this lineage? How does this cultural context both support and interfere with our capacity for growth? The same questions can be asked of all the oppressive systems that were in the soil as Alexander developed this work, which are still in the soil today: ableism, capitalism, sexism, classism, ageism, heteronormativity, etc.

Letting the work develop requires us to fearlessly and compassionately embrace the healthy shame we might feel about these elements within the history of our work, and within our own somas. Naming the elephants in the room is a practice of expanding our consciousness, and we can let it inform us as to the ways in which we need to question and grieve our past. Letting ourselves grieve is essential in transmuting our past to let it drive our work forward in

newly liberated ways. We are in active ongoing dialogue with our trainees at RIAT about how we can navigate these elements together.

Where are we now? We are in a time of collective overwhelm. I don't know about you, but for me it feels like there's a screaming goat that lives inside of me, and in moments of overwhelm he comes right to the surface. And if you haven't ever watched a YouTube video of screaming goats, I highly recommend doing so. We are all processing our ecological crisis and the collapse of many systems we may have previously believed were infallible, for better or worse. Many of our students are holding this reality in their somas, however consciously or not. We all know the Alexander Technique calls us into presence, but presence is difficult to maintain in the midst of collective overwhelm. You likely know that checking out and dissociation are actually essential survival strategies, but just as we have neuromuscular habits or tendencies that may no longer always serve us in the ways they once did, dissociation is a fragmented state in response to overwhelm that dis-integrates the wholeness of the use of ourselves.

Diving deeply into my own thresholds of overwhelm through personal trauma healing work, and becoming a trauma-informed Somatic Experiencing[®] practitioner has been essential in growing the space I am able to hold for students and our RIAT trainees. The science of the Alexander Technique tells us we work partly with our executive functioning processes governed by the prefrontal cortex. In trauma and overwhelm, our prefrontal cortexes get "hijacked" by our subcortical processes, including fight/flight/freeze. Case in point: I was driving along beautifully the other day, practicing hands on the back of the steering wheel, neck free, back back and up, legs lengthening away, etc. And then someone wouldn't let me merge onto the highway, and you should have seen how fast I went into fight mode, honking my horn, yelling obscenities (my windows were closed, thank God). At that moment, my logic and reasoning processes that are so beloved in our Technique work seemed to be about 99.9% offline, and it was not pretty.

The Alexander Technique's principles and means already offer a lot to help restore a sense of agency to our students, as I'm sure you witness regularly in your own practice. The slowing and stretching of time, the expansion of our sense of space, and the renegotiation of psychophysical support we offer ourselves and our students are all essential in healing trauma. *And* knowing how to spot trauma responses in ourselves and our students and the ability to support someone to come back into a manageable presence are skills I highly

encourage Alexander Technique teachers to gain and practice if you don't have them already, especially as the overwhelm doesn't seem to be going anywhere anytime soon. Between my training and Nan's graduate studies in psychology and theology from Union Theological Seminary, we aim to hold a sturdy, expansive, resilient container for our trainees to go as deep as they may wish and dare to go in their personal transformation processes.

Though we do not identify ourselves as healers in the Alexander Technique teaching community, healing shares etymological roots with "Whole" (w-h-o-l-e), and we are Wholers, don't you think? Though we may not be Wholer Rollers! As Wholers, we take it upon ourselves to become intimately familiar with the ways we depart from our presence so that we can help others recognize when they do the same. As Wholers, we facilitate folks in collecting and gathering themselves, body-mind-spirit. We ask, Where is integration needed? And where is differentiation needed? Toni Cade Bambara said that it is the culture worker's job to make revolution irresistible.³ As Wholers, I believe it is our job to live and teach in such a way that radical presence becomes irresistible.

Where are we now? This is a question of context and location, and therefore of relationships. The Alexander Technique helps us understand our context. We all direct ourselves something like this a million times a day: Your head and feet are in relationship to your spine, your heart, your fatty tissue. Your head and feet are in relationship to the ground, the ocean, and the stars. Your head and feet are in relationship to my head and my feet, my heart, my fatty tissue. We are here in relationship to these chairs, these walls, this gravitational field. We are here in relationship to everyone in this room on Zoom and beyond, those who have passed, and those who are to come. The ever-changing use of my self is always in relationship to your ever-changing use and vice versa. Our work is more alive when we relate to one another in imperfect, messy ways, when we let ourselves be moved by one another. A relational Alexander Technique moves our work out of mechanistic territory into an organic process.

As we understand the fullness and nuance of our own context and location, we help our students locate themselves. Lots of people in the twenty-first century seem to benefit from help in locating themselves. The more someone can locate themselves, the more agency they can have in how they show up in present

3 Thabiti Lewis, ed., *Conversations with Toni Cade Bambara* (Jackson, MI, University Press of Mississippi, 2012).

time and space, and how they want to move forward. Understanding location seems to be connected to understanding purpose, and understanding purpose seems potentially connected to an increased sense of belonging at the cosmic level. And if that's too far out for you, that's okay, but feel free to go there with me if you want! We place a hand on someone's back and through that touch we can communicate, "Here you are. You exist, and this is where and how you take up space." Some of us might also choose to communicate with our hand, "I'm so glad you're here."

People come to the Alexander Technique because they are seeking some kind of change, and I find it exciting to work with inhibition as the start of change that begins with accepting exactly where you are as fully as possible in this moment. What if we consider that before Alexander said "No" to a stimulus, there was a "Yes"? A Yes in his complete acknowledgment and acceptance that he was pulling his head back and down. Yes, I am doing something to myself. In my experience, the more fully, compassionately, and perhaps even gratefully, I can say yes to all that I am being and doing in myself in the present moment, the more I am actually setting the stage for deep change. Can this be part of deepening our roots? What if the deeper we drop into the fullness, and roundness, and plumpness, and juiciness of this moment, the more access we gain to the energy of extending and growing upwards and outwards?

And now for the question: Where do we want to go? I found out the root of the word "develop" comes from the French, meaning to unwrap and expose. To develop our work, what does the Alexander Technique unwrapped and exposed look like, sound like, move like, feel like? What would it mean to take off the metaphorical clothes of the Alexander Technique so it can streak naked through a field doing whispered "ahs" all along the way? I'm only partly kidding, because what I mean to invite is this wild energy as part of our practice. If we confuse conscious control for suppression or repression as I have certainly done before and may very well do again—much to my chagrin—we may forget to leave space for what is wild and unconscious, and then it will come out sideways, because it is there no matter what... and it *will* find a way to come out. Growth processes are wild. Wildness *is* the lively thing. The question becomes how to allow the wild energy without fragmenting. How can we maintain the integrity of our roots and structures and direct our growth so that wild energy can flow through our trunks and heads and limbs coherently?

It is an organic impulse for all of us who wish to develop the Technique to want to expand beyond convention, but we can't expand beyond convention if we don't know what convention is. To expand beyond convention is to push against the current structures and boundaries. These structures and boundaries have all been established out of necessity. In order to push against them, to grow beyond them intelligently, we've got to understand why they were established in the first place. The more we can intimately come to know a current structure, the more skillfully we can grow through, around, and beyond it, maintaining what's still useful and doing away with the rest.

To go where we want to go, we've got to make choices about what aspects of our work are life-giving and what detritus we want to allow to fall away. At RIAT, we often play with matching force. This term came out of our thirty-four-week science pilot and gave us language for some things we were already doing. It's a useful way to explore how in pushing against something we can meet whatever resistance we encounter with our own naturally occurring matching force, which can serve to generate a more well-distributed muscle tone throughout our whole selves. In this way we learn how to push sustainably—a delicious metaphor and a practical means.

Where do we want to go? Nan also heard Walter Carrington once say something like, *if you want to know where you are and where you're going, for goodness sake don't look inside*. To go where we want to go we need to have our senses oriented inwardly and outwardly simultaneously. Let's go in the direction of laughter and play. Come visit us at RIAT and we'll redo our salsa-frisbee directed activity, where we combine basic salsa steps with playing frisbee. People learn a lot about their primary control through the “sprialic” movements and how to employ a firm, yet open grip, à la hands-on-back-of-chair, as they catch and throw the frisbee!

Where do we want to go? Let's go in the direction of grieving what needs to be grieved and celebrating what warrants celebration. Let's open ourselves to other culturally diverse somatic practices, and let these experiences inform and shift our use. We are so lucky at RIAT that Nan and Caren [Bayer] are longtime tai chi practitioners, which very much informs their teaching and helps bridge Eastern and Western approaches. Let's go in the direction of appreciating how all of the branches of the Alexander Technique are connected to the same root system. Let's go in the direction of a beautiful marriage between the conscious and subconscious, the prefrontal cortex and subcortical processes. Let's go in

the direction of clearly defining our scope of practice as Alexander Technique teachers so that the people who are meant to know this work will recognize it is meant for them. Let's go in the direction of every time we put a hand on a student's back we sense all of our teachers at our own backs. Let's go in the direction of knowing our structures, our containers, our edges so well that we can skillfully and fearlessly expand them, grow beyond them, cross over them. Let's go in the direction of the lively thing!

About the Author

ARIEL CARSON (she/her) is an Alexander Technique teacher and Somatic Experiencing Practitioner (SEP) based in New York City. Her first Alexander Technique teacher was Betsy Polatin, and she received her AmSAT certification through ATNYC, headed by John Nicholls and Nanette Walsh. She is an Associate Director of Riverside Initiative for the Alexander Technique as well as a faculty member there. She also assists SE practitioner trainings and is approved to provide personal educational sessions to SE students at all levels. She has assisted



Photo by Kimberlee Venable

at the Juilliard School and guest taught at the Colburn School and Boston University, where she earned her BFA. She previously worked as a teaching artist for the Leadership Program, teaching leadership skills through the arts to under-served students in New York City public schools. She has worked with US veterans, activists, performers, social workers, and the LGBTQIA+ community, among many others. She is deeply committed to anti-oppression work and ongoing personal study and growth. She also believes self-care is inextricably connected with communal and environmental care. The native stewards of the land where she works and resides are the Lenape and Canarsee people. She is currently in training to become a facilitator of Family Constellations work.

THANK YOU AGAIN to the ACGM Committee and to Christopher for all of your work. I do know what it takes... and thank you for inviting Nanette [Walsh] and the RIAT [Riverside Initiative for the Alexander Technique] team to speak tonight. We are honored.

Nanette and Ariel [Carson] have already addressed the questions that Christopher suggested we discuss regarding how RIAT has been growing through the last few years. I can only add a bit of perspective and will keep it simple.

We should all be grateful to all the training-course directors and their supporters for continuing the work. We need excellent teachers to keep the work of F.M. Alexander alive and well and increasingly available to the public.

You all know how helpful this work is. Nanette, with her vision and fierce persistence, has been building our training course with high standards and a rigorous course of study. We follow the AmSAT training course standards and we support our trainees through the bumps and thumps that happen along the way. As Nanette mentioned, and we all experienced, there have been some tough times in recent years.

RIAT is growing and moving forward through increasing our “AT for All” community classes, and events like the tribute to Dr. John Austin. It was a thoughtful celebration of Dr. Austin and his work. And the event brought many local Alexander Technique teachers together for a joyous occasion.

The “Pain Science for AT Teachers” course that will begin in the fall through Sapientia/RIAT is another step in expanding professional development opportunities and connecting Alexander Technique teachers near and far. I am going to take the course, and I hope that some of you will join me. You can do it online. Information regarding the course is on our website. Check it out. It will be a tax-deductible educational course for you!

As an experienced teacher, I still find explaining the work in clear, simple terms very challenging. For our trainees, I try to keep the focus on their use while going through the steps of learning “hands-on skills.”

For the future of the work, the rigor of training, the daily discipline, is essential. Loosening standards to make training easier should always be considered very carefully.

For training-course directors and all of us as teachers: If you wish to expand your reach and have more students, remember how much you have gained

from the work. Share your joy and enthusiasm as you talk about the work and as you teach. It will be infectious and maybe, maybe... your work will go viral!

Thank you all, have fun out there. Please join me and sign up for the Pain Science course. Come visit us in New York City.

Keep the work deep and delightful!

About the Author

LORI SCHIFF is a full-time professor of the Alexander Technique at the Juilliard School and a guest teaching artist for various schools and organizations nationally and internationally. She has been a faculty member of the Juilliard School since 1991 and was in residence at the Aspen Music Festival and School from 1993 to 2015.

Ms. Schiff joined the Riverside Initiative for the Alexander Technique as Associate Director and Senior Teacher for Teacher Training in 2018.

Ms. Schiff was certified as a Teacher of the Alexander Technique at ACAT-New York in 1987. She continued with years of postgraduate training with Walter and Dilys Carrington at the Constructive Teaching Centre in London.

She is a graduate of the Northwestern University School of Music in trumpet performance and has her master's in music from the Manhattan School of Music.

She served as the Alexander Technique Teacher for the Metropolitan Opera Lindemann Young Artists Development Program, and at the 92nd Street Y in New York City. She also served on the senior faculty of the American Center for the Alexander Technique's Teacher Certification Program.



Photo courtesy of the author

Letting the Work Develop

The F.M. Alexander Memorial Address, July 14, 2024

ALICE OLSHER

I AM GOING TO START by reading you a poem.

Ways I use the Technique now for self-care as I am aging—

Walking

Swimming

Lying down

Relationships

Interaction

When I am overwhelmed, as I was many times writing this talk, knowing what to say to you—

I have a lie-down

Do whispered “Ahs”

Look at structuring a plan for the day

Simple, good food

Gentle exercise

How it was—

I was a talented and scared kid

Felt unheard and unseen

Met the Technique lessons

Training and became a trainer

Learned to stop... give time... see myself

Then I could see you

I learned how to stand sit bend take my weight your weight, which was taught in a very clear step manner always with focus on myself quieting the nervous system allowing vibrant connections in the musculature.

As I said once—

I could see how to see and be with me I could be with others where they are.

It is an honour to stand before you.

When I was asked to give this address, I felt honored and also had a lot of fear. I wondered for quite a while what I would talk about. The solution came with a request: I have been asked to talk about the future of the Alexander Technique with the theme of Letting the Work Develop.

I want to read a quote from “The Hobbit” by Tolkien:

“Where did you go to, if I may ask?” said Thorin to Gandalf as they rode along.

“To look ahead,” said he.

“And what brought you back in the nick of time?”

“Looking behind,” said he.

Reflecting back to where I come from allows me to go forward. It gives me somewhere to go forward from.

To talk about the future of the Alexander Technique, I will start by looking behind to talk to you about where I came from, why I learned the Technique, how over a very long time and with a lot of consistent work on myself day by day, minute by minute, it helped me learn to observe myself and react differently. This is how the work developed in me, and I use it every minute of every day.

I am using it right now to talk to you.

The Alexander Technique is ever evolving, as we are always evolving and learning about ourselves. I want to talk about this evolution from my experience, and my memory. I speak from my perception of my experiences.

In 1971, I was a first-year college student, singer, and actress. I had been searching to find myself and had dreamed of going to London to study, act, and sing. I left California for three months of travel and ended up auditioning for the Drama Studio London and was accepted. Three months became thirty-three years!

Alice then and now



Alice with Walter Carrington

The course started in September 1972. Mary Holland came to the Drama Studio, and I got a fifteen-minute demonstration of the Alexander Technique. This first meeting with Mary changed the trajectory of my life. I had been searching for myself, and here was the solution.

We were each allocated ten Alexander lessons at the Drama Studio, and Mary Holland was our teacher. I continued private lessons with Mary at 18 Lansdowne Road where she had her practice and also taught on the Constructive Teaching Centre training course. Those lessons continued from 1972 all the way until 1984 when she moved to Germany.

One day, in my first year of lessons, I went to have a lesson with Mary at Lansdowne Road, but instead of having the lesson, Dilys Carrington called us upstairs to her flat to watch the royal wedding of Princess Anne, which introduced me to Dilys and her flat where I would spend many years—and to the English tradition of royalty. The importance of that experience was the beginning of a long friendship—in a culture where I became very at home—and of work that became the lens I used to move on a journey of self-discovery and self-healing... and ultimately to teaching the Alexander Technique.

During that time, I had lessons from time to time with Walter and Dilys Carrington. I also had lessons with Joan Murray. After Mary moved to Germany I worked with Karen Wentworth and John Nicholls, and from 1986—till she stopped working—I worked with Peggy Williams once a month. I also had lessons from Ilan Riechel, who taught the Alexander Technique at the Actors Centre in London. A lot of working actors in London frequented the Actors Centre.

I spent fifteen years having lessons and using my Technique work while working in various places: in a hospital, in the theatre, on stage, acting and singing, backstage up in the lighting booth, and on the follow spot for the Royal Ballet.

I had gone all the way through the Drama Studio, learning with the help of my Alexander Technique thinking, giving myself time and clarity. When I worked in a hospital for a year and a half, I used [that same way of] thinking, taking time, finding clarity, and learning what was asked of me in the hospital. I drew on that experience years later when I worked teaching the Technique in a health clinic in San Diego where we were working with brain injury patients.

I also worked in a puppet company as one of my lovely theatre jobs. The director said I was a natural as a puppeteer, which I had no experience in. I think he picked up my Technique inhibition and got fooled and then didn't give

me instruction! All was well doing mask work, which was using my body and extending the character through a mask. But then we moved to rod puppets. He thought I would pick it up as easily as I had the masks. But I found that it was a really different skill and I didn't have any training in that [one]. It was hard to ask for help because he had said I was a natural. After struggling for a few weeks, I finally asked if someone would teach me to work the rods and they did. What a relief to get that help!

In 1987, I started teacher training at the Constructive Teaching Centre (known as CTC) at 18 Lansdowne Road—Dilys and Walter Carrington's teacher training course.

The Training

I trained to continue the journey that I was on, not sure if I would be good at teaching. I wanted to have the work in me all the time. This was most important to me. And the absolute clarity of the training was a perfect fit for me (different from the puppet company!). It brought me—and still brings me—to my best self. But more than that, by the time I finished training, I just wanted to remain in that environment, and that is how I deepened and refined my skills as a teacher.

In the beginning of my training, I saw it differently. I remember when I started, I sought out outside therapy, and I thought there should be therapy groups for people to talk about and process their feelings about the work—or the feelings that came up through doing the work. Walter felt that it was important if people wanted it to have them get therapy outside the training.

I understood later that the training was for individuals in a group and that on a big training course like CTC—over forty trainees some years—there wasn't time or space for anything but the training itself.

The Structural Evolution of Walter's Training

I would like to talk a bit about the evolution and innovations in the training at the Constructive Teaching Centre.

While I was at CTC, I had the opportunity to see the great contributions that Dilys Carrington made to the work and to the Alexander Technique community.

For me personally, the work that I did with her was instrumental in the way that I learned to use myself, and in how I teach students and also how I train teachers and do post-graduate work. Dilys's way of teaching hands-on, which was even, respectful, and calm, started with her way of teaching you to come back to yourself. I was given the experiences needed to understand how to continue to inhibit and direct and use the whole self while putting hands on. Brilliant for me!

Training with Dilys and also with Walter, included "games," hands-on groups, private lessons... it was such a joy for me. It felt like the puzzle pieces were coming together. Later I felt so glad to pass this structure on to other students once I was teaching. And as I learned more [of the Technique's history], I understood that the things I loved about the structure were Walter's innovations.

Walter and Dilys were always developing and evolving. Walter had trained with F.M. Alexander, and [both] Walter and Dilys very much kept [to his] principles, which normally kept the structure of the training the same every day. However, they were [also] always open to [the possibility of] change within the structure of the training.

This combination of clear, consistent structure and openness gave me and others space to grow and learn.

I [have been] telling you my experience as a teacher who started training thirty-two years after F. M. Alexander died. To provide a larger context of the evolution of training, I wish to also look at how it [has] developed since his death.

Jean Fischer, publisher of Mouritz and living and running a training course in Graz, Austria, made a "Family Timeline" of Trainings. After Alexander's death in 1955 his training course was continued by Margaret Goldie, Walter Carrington, Irene Stewart and John Skinner, and Peggy Williams, first at Ashley Place and from April 1956 at Bainbridge Street in London. In 1960 Walter Carrington moved to 18 Lansdowne Road, London W11, and the training course became the Constructive Teaching Centre.

At Lansdowne Road, Walter added time to read Alexander's books out loud to the class as he felt the books were very important to learning and understanding what Alexander was teaching us. It was done lecture style, and trainees could ask questions informally during turns. He introduced private lessons into the training curriculum. He felt people needed a place to speak privately with him. He also added teaching hands-on in groups of three. He felt observation was



Clockwise from top left:
Karen Wentworth | Peggy Williams |
Bill Benham, Frances Robertson, Alice
Olsher, Ruth Murray | John Nicholls



important in learning—and in a group of three, there was the opportunity for observing as well as for experiencing.

Another change Walter made that also helped trainees to build their observation skills was to start new trainees three times a year. That made it easy for the trainees to see what it had been like the term before and what it might look like the term after.

And he added what he called “games,” which included procedures to understand the use of ourselves and the Alexander Technique. He (and later, Dilys) called them “games” to help people enjoy and observe without trying to get the movements right. Each movement was broken down and built up slowly with primary focus on the use of self rather than on getting the movement “right.”

These games would include standing, sitting, hands-on-back-of-chair, hands on the table, lifting using telephone books, going up on toes and going up stairs, and other activities. These activities all led to skills needed to live and to teach the Technique.

Dilys worked with Walter, and all three years of trainees were together in the class. But eventually, the first-year trainees were separated, and Dilys led that class. This was innovative, and it gave Dilys more responsibility. The way Dilys taught the first-year class evolved and developed over time.

She used groups of three both for hands-on groups and for games, just as Walter did with the more advanced trainees. The first week of training each term started with breaking down what we now respectfully call the position of mechanical advantage over several days of games, the same every day. This meticulous work prepared students for their first hands-on group.

Eventually, Dilys kept the trainees yet another term beyond first year, teaching them her spiral groups and giving them permission to practice without direct supervision. She developed ways to give trainees more responsibility and independence so they could get confidence to put hands on. She was always working on herself, and she was always teaching her new ideas to all of us, too. In fact, Walter and Dilys went to Norfolk for holidays and often when they returned they would have new ideas to share with the teachers and the trainees.

In 1986, Carolyn Nicholls produced a spiral notebook called “Notes Towards a Method for Training Alexander Teachers,” where she recorded Dilys taking a group through the whole first year of training. This curriculum demonstrates a clear hands-on training sequence and is used in many training courses internationally as part of how they teach hands-on. After I qualified, I wanted

to follow Dilys the way Carolyn did, so I could observe the process of learning hands-on that I had experienced. This led to me assisting her with groups. I learned about observation, and I learned how Dilys taught people to understand direction through their hands.

I learned more than I had imagined I would.

All of the games and hands-on groups developed the trainees' ability to stay with themselves, to get the inhibition and direction/thinking going while they put hands on another trainee without taking weight and then while taking weight.

Let me describe the purpose of the group of three: One person was the "pupil" (the person being worked on). The second person put their hands on, and the third person had a quiet hand on the back of the person who was "working." Having the third person place a quiet hand on was the brilliant way Dilys taught the trainee to recognize direction coming through their hands.

What Dilys—and Walter—brought to me and the training was this clear, calm consistency, even as they continued to evolve. Dilys said how good it was to be in the training with young people to keep her thinking—and it did keep her thinking and innovating. Dilys continued to develop her work while I was training and then while I was teaching there. She kept discovering, really, until the end of her life.

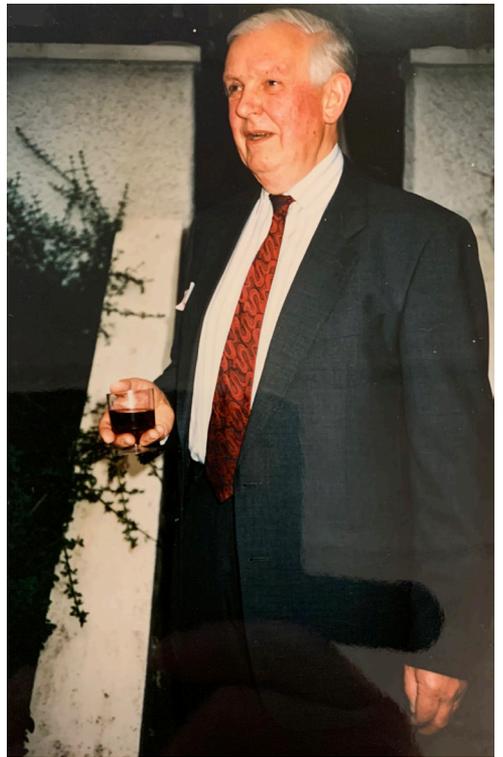
Dilys's games and hands-on groups prepared the trainee for the work with Walter. Walter's groups were almost always chair work. He felt that it was so important to practice staying with yourself while meeting the stimulus of putting hands on another person.

Another innovation of Dilys's and Walter's that I want to mention is the way they helped final-term trainees experience teaching by giving them the opportunity to teach first-year trainees on the course. And then as graduates, they continued with first-year trainees for Dilys, and also began teaching more advanced trainees in Walter's class for one or two more terms after qualifying. For this, they received a nominal fee and reaped the benefit of the continued experience of the whole training day.

We also took the final-term trainees and new teachers to assist in outside workshops to give them experience.

After training, I taught on the course for fifteen years. For the first eight, I taught full-time, and after my first child, I taught part-time. I was very used to working with the Carringtons in this large training. I worked very closely

Alice



Walter & Dilys Carrington

with Dilys and, often, over a cup of tea or when she was making dinner on a Friday night, listened to her talk through her thoughts about training. Being part of the training course helped me to continue my development of myself and also gave me knowledge of training.

I have talked a lot about Dilys Carrington, and not so much about Walter and the importance of my relationship with him. He taught me about respect. He taught me about meeting people where they were because he always did that. He taught by example. All my time with Dilys—and Walter—taught me to meet people where they are, and it lives in me all the time.

In addition to Walter and Dilys, there was a team of teachers at Lansdowne Road, and it was an amazing place—as many know who came to visit. We talked things through with each other to make sense of what we were teaching. Everyone was applying inhibition and direction in their interactions with the students and each other. It was a gift to deal with my reactions to stimulus by quieting my system.

Since childhood, I had a lot of anxiety, and the Alexander Technique always helped me; that is one of the reasons I fell in love with it so instantaneously. But [though] the Technique did not remove my anxiety, it always helped me to acknowledge and then quiet my reactions and come back to myself. So here, I got to practice daily and moment by moment along with others doing the same, and it was very helpful to me.

Crossroads

Before returning to California, I had thought I would stay at the Constructive Teaching Centre for the rest of my career—but life does not always go to plan.

Around Christmas 2004, I went on holiday from CTC and travelled with my family to California to help my parents. I initially thought it would be for just a month, a temporary stay—and that we would soon be returning to London. As the months went by, it became clear that returning to London as regular faculty was not going to happen, at least not at that time.

During this period, I was speaking with Dilys on the phone at least weekly. Over time, I realized that California was going to become a long-term situation. As I was confronting this, Walter had a fall. I went to visit him, and [while I



Clockwise from top left: The Constructive Teaching Center | Jean Fischer | Walter & Dilys Carrington



Alexander Teaching Centre in San Diego, CA

was still there] he died. I stayed on briefly for the funeral and went back six weeks later for the memorial.

[When I was] back in California, Dilys [got in touch and] asked me, “When will your class begin? I trained you to be a trainer and either you come ‘home’ and work on the training course, or you need to start a training course there.”

So—I decided to start a training course in San Diego. This is when I realised how all those years teaching and observing at CTC had prepared me for this moment of becoming a training-course director. I set to work.

I now see—as a trainer—that the private lessons prepare people for training. To stand in front of the chair and not sit down is the beginning of learning inhibition and direction. This is why we need thirty lessons before we can be ready to be trained. And that is why I gave lessons to the prospective trainees, even though they had already studied with another teacher.

It took two years of giving them private lessons till I felt we were ready to begin their training. After those two years—which included the year I spent writing the application to become a training-course director—the curriculum was clear, the term dates were set, and we were ready to begin.

As I began running my training course on my own, I learned with absolute clarity that it was one thing to be working in the CTC training—with the team of teachers, supported by decades of the Carrington's experience, and being an integral part of the fabric of that long-established and large training course—and that it was quite another thing to have my own training course thousands of miles away from where I had trained.

Being director—being in charge—of a very new and very small training course was totally different from what I had known. There was a different dynamic with a small course and less chance for observation.

There was also less variation in who the trainees could work with. In my course, we had only one small group. I included hands-on groups every day, and it was quite interesting that without the possibility to observe others, it was hard for the trainees to adjust into putting hands on outside of their hands-on group. It was a process, and I learned to be creative.

For support, I had Dilys on the phone every week for the first year.

Before she died, Dilys told me, "Rome is there. You will be alright."

And we were alright... More than alright.

Rome Roberts Earle had trained for two years with F.M. Alexander, worked with Marjory Barlow, and then twenty years later took her final year with Patrick Macdonald. [Rome and I] were colleagues and friends. She assisted on my training course, and we worked together every week that we were both in town, till the pandemic.

The work with her was wonderful for me as well as for the trainees. She could talk about her training with Alexander, which was very lucky for me and my trainees.

John Nicholls was [also] very supportive. We had long emails back and forth and telephone calls talking things through.

Eileen Troberman came in and taught anatomy. Both Rome and Eileen supported my style of training all the way through. In the last year of training, they showed the different ways they had learned to do different procedures, as Eileen had worked a lot with Marj Barstow, and Rome had worked with Patrick Macdonald as well as Alexander and Marjory Barlow.



Letting the work develop. At top right, with Rome Earle

The Los Angeles training course directors were only two and a half hours up the road. They were always helpful to run things by.

Jean Fischer and Karen Wentworth came to teach.

Mary Holland was always there to consult with from the time I met her in 1972 through all the changes in my life. Since she passed last year, there has been a big gap in my life.

So many people helped me in those years. And not only did I have individuals supporting me, but I had AmSAT as well.

In my training, we were encouraged to join STAT and be actively part of it. When I arrived in California, I knew to do the same [thing here]. So, I joined AmSAT. The American teachers (and after all, I am American-born) have been wonderful, welcoming me into the community since I got back in 2005. I feel it is important to be part of the organization so as to be part of the change, which is why I joined the board last year when I was asked.

And I had Alexander's books. In March 2005—a few months before his death—Walter told a story about when he was assisting on Alexander's training. He said that when FM was alive, he could always ask him about any issue—he always had that constant support. And then of course one day FM was no longer there—and Walter no longer had that direct support, but he had FM's books.

This was then true for me as well—Walter wasn't there, and after the first year of my training school, Dilys was no longer available, but I had Alexander's books.

I continue to reread them. During the pandemic, I joined some great reading groups. In one, we explore and fathom out the complexity of Alexander's writing. In another, we read other Alexander-related books. As an aside, I will say: the books are not easy to read from a twenty-first-century perspective. There are things in them that are offensive—racially especially. And yet there is all the rest—the parts of the books that are the foundation for what we do. Those are the parts I turned to and relied on, and when the difficult bits came up during class reading time, we talked about them.

As my course progressed, I set up my own post-grad program for the teachers I had trained and used other teachers who wanted to have post-grad work to help augment the training when I was doing a one-to-one training. I had found my way.

And then the pandemic came. It was good that at the time of the pandemic my course had gone on hiatus. I got together with other teachers, Mary included, and figured out how to stay with the principles while teaching online.



L Dilys Carrington | R Mary Holland and Walter Carrington

To start, I worked with teachers and pupils who had already experienced my hands.

Through the distance created by the internet, I used my theatre skills, my ability to use my voice, and my visual acuity to help people to direct.

Teaching online is not my preference, but it has its good parts. I could teach people to be still with themselves without hands-on, and sometimes have them put hands on themselves. It meant that I could work with people internationally, which I loved. I still have a virtual performers group that meets once a week with students from all over the world—which is really lovely. It started as the emergency lie-down group in the beginning of the pandemic and evolved into this performers group. I also co-taught an acting class online: improvisation, and Chekov.

And I taught several types of post-graduate groups. I did some work in other people's training courses, exploring teaching Dilys's spirals work in a new way. I repeated it with several groups.

And I took a group of teachers through a seven-month class applying Adlerian principles to themselves using the Alexander Technique. (I have studied Alfred Adler deeply and love the Adlerian philosophy of mutual respect, which is so fitting for us as Alexander Technique teachers). In the class, teachers discussed how they could apply these principles to themselves and then to their pupils. The other thing that I was able to do online was join people together: when Ruth Murray died in March 2021, the funeral was online. And we were able to attend the funeral. Then months later, there was a memorial

concert at the Constructive Teaching Centre, which was attended live, and we were able to attend via Zoom.

When Rome Earle died, also in 2021, I was able to gather people together online—with the help of Frances Marsden—to honour Rome and to share memories with her family. A priceless event.

I helped to get Mary Holland to do a talk for AmSAT through Taking Time to Connect. It was a gift to the community.

Although I found I could teach online, looking back, I had always imagined that I would be using my skills teaching in person in a large training course in London and or in California.

Instead, I had a small training course. Since the pandemic, although I still do a bit of teaching online and in person, I do not have trainees on my course. And I do not know how that will evolve.

Many of the people who taught me to understand the Technique, who supported me in so many of my choices in the Technique, are no longer here. I feel that loss of support, but I have the books, my study groups, and over fifty years of working on myself. And I have AmSAT. And still, a lot is unknown. The future is uncertain.

In this time of uncertainty, my Alexander Technique training is with me. I am staying with the unknown, not tightening, not shortening or pulling down, allowing the feelings that come up to come and go. I am trusting in the process, being in the present, not knowing what the future is for me... (who does really?).

The Future of the Alexander Technique

So, let's ask the question: what is the future of the Alexander Technique? I am having these individual questions in my own life as I said—wondering what the future will bring. The Alexander Technique Community as a whole is also grappling with uncertainty. Some of the existential questions we are facing are:

Who can afford to train as an Alexander Technique teacher?

How can teachers of the Alexander Technique make enough to live on?

How can we make training courses more accessible to more people?

How can small training courses survive and thrive? How can training course directors make a living and make courses affordable for trainees?



Clockwise, from top left: Karen Wentworth teaching | Eileen Troberman | With Mary Holland

How can we best use the tools and skills we have learned during the pandemic to further the work and our interconnection with each other?

How can we make the Alexander Technique community as inclusive and accessible as possible?

Most training courses are not so big at the moment. Training-course directors are having to be more inventive to deliver trainings. Even while I am living with these questions, this uncertainty brings me back to the same thing: I have to come back to myself and join from the place of quiet presence without trying to force solutions; I have to give space to myself and others, to listen and see what will emerge.

Conclusion

Looking ahead, it is not clear where I will go or how the Technique will develop. What I know is, if we continue to use our skills, we will continue to come back to ourselves, and that is what makes it okay to venture into the unknown. That is how we develop, and how the work develops.

I am so grateful for this work that has given me a way of living that I can keep coming back to every day.

A Note of Thanks...

I have been so lucky to work with and learn from so many wonderful people, including all of you. Now that I've finished, I am going to read this poem to you again.

Ways I use the Technique now for self-care as I am aging—

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Swimming

Lying down

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When I am overwhelmed, as I was many times writing this talk, knowing what to say to you—

I have a lie-down

Do whispered “Ahs”

Look at structuring a plan for the day

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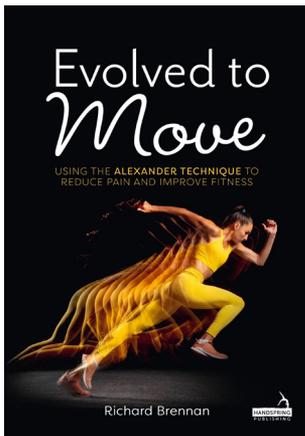
As I said once—

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Review

Evolved to Move: Using the Alexander Technique to Reduce Pain and Improve Fitness, by Richard Brennan

Handspring, 2025. Available: alexander.ie/books.html and us.singingdragon.com/products/evolved-to-move



Richard Brennan's *Evolved to Move: Using the Alexander Technique to Reduce Pain and Improve Fitness* is a valuable contribution to the growing body of literature on the Alexander Technique. Concise and accessible, the book features ample illustrations and photographs that effectively supplement its theoretical foundations. Brennan, who has directed the Alexander Teacher Training College in Ireland since 1998, draws on thirty years of teaching experience to pack considerable insight into 150 pages. While the book's primary audience consists of those teaching the Technique and running-related programs, it remains accessible to newcomers and serves as a structured reference for those seeking certification or looking to refine their personal practice.

Brennan's journey to the Alexander Technique began with his own search for relief from chronic back pain. After exploring numerous approaches—from acupuncture to Feldenkrais—he found that only the Alexander Technique methods provided marked relief. This personal experience sparked his desire to collect and present his discoveries in a concise and approachable format.

The book's opening chapters briefly explore the history of the Alexander Technique, followed by an examination of the significant (and often overlooked) role that habit plays in daily life. Subsequent chapters cover sensory awareness, sensory feedback, posture, and the importance of awareness throughout

Alexander Technique practice. Alexander's concept of inhibition receives thorough attention, as does the role of thinking in activity and directional thinking. Chapters include detailed exercise descriptions, complete with guidelines for constructive rest. The concluding chapters feature anatomical illustrations and discuss the mental, physical, and emotional aspects of the Alexander Technique. Each chapter ends with bullet-point summaries for quick reference. The back matter includes information and testimonials from medical professionals, along with international websites and suggestions for further reading.

Alexander teachers and trainers, particularly those working in healthcare fields, will find this a worthwhile addition to their professional library. It's also an excellent study guide for anyone considering Alexander Technique lessons, certification, or more broadly, somatic work aimed at reducing pain or improving quality of life.

JOE ALBERTI & GENOA DAVIDSON