

# The Early History of F. M. Alexander: Jeroen Staring Talk at the American Center for the Alexander Technique, 02-13-2002<sup>1</sup>

**Staring:** I'm an anthropologist from Holland and right now I'm a school teacher.<sup>2</sup> I've also studied medicine. I became interested in the Alexander Technique in 1979 when doing anthropological research<sup>3</sup> in Poona, India on the Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh Ashram. One of the followers of Bhagwan was an Alexander Technique teacher who gave me an "Alex-



Jeroen Staring at ACAT— 02/13/2002

ander massage." That was the first and the last time that I ever had an Alexander massage but that was how I became interested in this work. After the session, I felt very light, walking on a cloud. You all may have had a similar experience following your first lessons.

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1. Transcribed, edited and annotated by Ed Bouchard. When Jane Tomkiewicz, Executive Director of the American Center for the Alexander Technique (ACAT), learned that Jeroen and Corry Staring would be vacationing in New York, she invited them to attend the ACAT Annual General Meeting, which was occurring the weekend of February 9-10 and arranged for Staring to present his critique of the generally recognized history of the development of the Alexander Technique on Wednesday, February 13, 2002.
  2. Jeroen teaches math, chemistry and physics at Economisch College Maarssen, a public secondary school in Maarssen, The Netherlands. Together with Corry, his wife, he is curating an exhibition on human evolution at the Anatomical and Pathological Museum at the Catholic University of Nijmegen, The Netherlands.
  3. At the Catholic University of Nijmegen, The Netherlands. See:  
Staring, Jeroen, (1986), *Kritische kanttekeningen bij Bhagwan en neo-sannyasins*. De Witte Cirkel, Zeist.  
Staring, Jeroen, (1983). "De homo clausus en de socioblabla van een sektoloog. (Luik 1: Versnelde civilisering, hogere eisen van zelf-controle, kwetsbaarder worden en sociaal gevoel; Luik 2: Over een studie van een sektoloog die mythen bouwt)." *Critic*, Vol. 13, No. 2, pp 25-38.  
Staring, Jeroen, (1983), "Ik ben er zelf niet meer." *Critic*, Vol. 13, No. 2, pp 40-43.  
Staring, Jeroen, (1980), "Shoes and minds are to be left at the gate. (Over de misplaatste metafysica van sannyasins)." *Pottkijker*, Vol. 6, No. 2, pp 60-80.

I looked for a teacher in the Netherlands. There was one teacher but the lessons were far too expensive for me. More often than not the case, in New York too, people find AT lessons rather expensive. Instead, I started to study the texts — texts by Alexander, on Alexander, related to Alexander. And I worked just on my own together with my wife Corry from what we were able to gather from those texts.<sup>4</sup>

Later we met an Alexander Technique teacher, Loes Bredius, who was actually the first certified teacher in the Netherlands. At the time, Loes lived only 10 miles away. So Corry and I went to her for lessons. We had individual AT lessons and had an informal course, not to train to teach but to learn how to apply with each other the Alexander Technique procedures like guiding someone in and out of a chair.

But I am not claiming to teach and I don't claim to teach. What is moonshining?

**Audience:** Moonlighting

**Staring:** So, I am not moonlighting, I am a historical anthropologist who is interested in the history of civilizations. That is, I am interested in researching how do we as a people — as human beings — become civilized? I am influenced by the work of Norbert Elias, a German Jew who fled Germany to England just before the Second World War. Elias wrote a book on civilization.<sup>5</sup> His social theory is an inspiration for me. In addition to Norbert Elias, I believe, one can use the Alexander Technique to enrich the theory of Norbert Elias and add depth to it. Elias's *homo clausus*, or "closed human" theory, states that humans are alienated from others and closed within themselves — as living within their borders. This research on the connections between the physical habits observed by Alexander Technique teachers and Elias theory has not yet been done.



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4. Corry Staring, MD is a Professor of Medicine at the Hogeschool Brabant, Nursing Department, in Breda, the Netherlands

5. Elias, Norbert (1939). *The Civilizing Process: The History of Manners and State Formation and Civilization*, Blackwell, Translated by Edmund Jephcott, 1994, available at: [http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0631221611/qid=1035323099/sr=2-1/ref=sr\\_2\\_1/104-8532673-1523131](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0631221611/qid=1035323099/sr=2-1/ref=sr_2_1/104-8532673-1523131)

Let me start at the beginning. The phrase “Alexander Technique” is an eponym. That is to say, in the phrase The Alexander Technique, the name of the founder is used in the description of the Technique. It is a phrase like Mendel’s laws, or Darwinism, or Maoism, an eponym. But it is not yet an eponym in Martin Manser’s famous book, *Dictionary of Eponyms*. Alexander Technique teachers also use it as a verb. I am Alexandering. You are Alexandering. You have all done that as well. I think. (Laughter).

But it is not a word that is common knowledge as yet. There are other teachers of physical therapies like Bess Mensendieck, who is more well-known in Europe (also an eponym in Europe: “Mensendieck Therapy.”)<sup>6</sup>

Alexander came from a family where his grandfather and his grandfather’s brother had participated in an uprising, the Swing Riots. These were rick and barn burning and destruction of threshing machines riots in England in the early 1830s. When the landlords were taking too much money from the tenants. Others like wheelwrights, smiths, and people working on the land didn’t have enough money to survive. They rose up against the landlords. They burned some barns and ricks — read *Captain Swing* by historians Eric Hobsbawm and George Rudé.<sup>7</sup> They sent threatening letters with the name Captain Swing, hence the name Swing Riots.

Many were caught and were sentenced to Australia to work there. When they had completed seven years, they mostly stayed in Australia and Tasmania. Alexander’s grandfather, Matthias, was sent to Tasmania together with his brother Joseph (both men are actually mentioned in page 237 of *Captain Swing*). Alexander’s grandfather married. Had children. These married, in turn, and had children. Alexander had nine brothers and sisters, two of which didn’t survive their early years.<sup>8</sup>

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6. Bess Mesendieck (1864-1958), born and educated in New York, completed her medical degree at the University of Zurich and developed a program of “functional exercises” for physical therapy and general wellness. She studied with the American Delsartean Genevieve Stebbins and claimed to base her program on “scientific study of anatomy and physiology and...the natural laws under which they operate [to] instill a conscious awareness of muscular function [and] counteract *faulty use*” (emphasis added, Nancy Lee Chalfa Ruyter’s *The Cultivation of Body and Mind in Nineteenth-Century American Delsartism*, Greenwood Press, 1999, p 67; available at amazon.com: <http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/search-handle-form/104-8532673-1523131>).

7. Hobsbawm, Eric J. and Rudé, George (1975). *Captain Swing*. W.W. Norton and Co.

8. For an excellent account of this period see JA Evans’s *Frederick Matthias Alexander: A Family History*. Phillimore, London, 2001, pp. 3–47), available through AmSAT Books at <http://www.alexandertech.org/>.

The psychological upbringing of these children was religious, methodist. In all probability, Alexander's father was an alcoholic, sometimes violent as well. In 1896, Alexander's mother and two sisters left his father in Tasmania for Melbourne, Australia where Alexander and his brother (AR) had sufficient income to sustain them. AR later emigrated to America,

Alexander had to work when he was very young, fifteen years old, and had to give money to his family to help raise the children. So from the start, he was not only having a double consciousness because of his idea of England where his grandfather was sent away as a criminal. In his mind, England was the cultural peak in the history of his life. He also had a double consciousness on his father who was an violent man and a alcoholic. Most alcoholics were violent. Alexander developed a double consciousness toward authority. That comes back to influence his life as well.

Alexander had to work when he was fifteen to help sustain his family. He went to work in a tin mine, as a clerk. He also learned about the theater. He wanted to pursue a career in the theatre. Later he went to Melbourne, where he started giving recitals. He performed parts of Shakespeare and other small plays and acts from works.

**Bouchard:** According to Rosslyn McLeod's *Up From Down Under* and her articles in the *Alexander Review*, Alexander's performing venue was of a tradition that somewhat resembled American Vaudeville or English music halls.<sup>9</sup>

**Staring:** He later started to tour. In 1894, he toured Tasmania. In 1895, he toured New Zealand.

While in Tasmania, his brother saw him on stage and remarked that he was a lousy speaker, that you couldn't quite hear him at the back of the room, a large room with many people in it.

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9. McLeod's research indicates that Alexander performed in the medium-sized theatres to favorable and to mixed reviews. Her book *Up From Down Under* (1995) is available through AmSAT books at <http://www.alexandertech.org/books/books.html>. The best account of Alexander's performing is McLeod's 1987 article "F.M. – Critiques, 'Consumption,' Commentaries," *Alexander Review* Vol.2. No. 2 pp7–11. There she reproduces reviews from the September, 3, 1900 *Sydney Morning Herald*, where Alexander is praised for "his knowledge of the whole art of elocution and the lights and shades necessary to dramatic effect" and from a June 28, 1901 *Sydney Morning Herald* review of *The Merchant of Venice*, where Alexander is criticized for "starting the Tubal scene through nervousness in too high a key, so that the final frenzy became much too melodramatic" but also noted that "his scholarly elocution carried him through the trial scene."

Later in 1895, he received a letter from his mother that she had left her husband. He then went afterwards to Melbourne, where he became rather successful as a teacher of elocution and breathing. He had planned to go to the United States together with a man called Professor Loissette, who wasn't an actual professor. Loissette performed with memory tricks to memorize things like all the Presidents of the US, the Royal line of England, etcetera, etcetera. Loissette had tried to sell his memory technique in the US. He had not invented it but had stolen it from different books, put it together. He sold the course for \$150.00. He had people who took his course sign a contract saying that they would not tell the secrets he would give to them. Loissette was a con man. Alexander befriended him and learned the tricks of conning. While on the other hand, Loissette, the con man, once back in the US in 1896, published a book, *Assimilative Memory*, giving away his "secrets." In this book it is the first time any one mentioned Alexander, not referred to by name as Alexander but as a teacher of expression.<sup>10</sup>

Alexander, we know from the work of Alex Murray, was interested in the Delsarte method, at least in the American part of it shown in the work of Genevieve Stebbins.<sup>11</sup> It is a rather difficult way of dramatic expression. It has a lot of philosophy. All kinds of gestures have their philosophy behind them. If you want to express this as a teacher, you have to remember a lot. So, Loissette helped Alexander remember what Delsarte and his followers have said so that he could teach it well.

How do I know that in his book in fact Loissette is referring to Alexander? Because the 1896 book has the same, exactly the same, text as in the little booklets that Loissette had sold in America before he was exposed. Loissette was exposed by a man named Geroge Fellows of New York who had bought his memory course and recognized that the text in Loissette's booklets on the method was stolen from other books. He wrote a book that gave the history of Loissette's booklets and exposed him as a con man.<sup>12</sup> Once exposed, Loissette went to England, then to India, later to New Zealand.

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10. Loissette, A. (1896). *Assimilative Memory*. Funk and Wagnalls, New York, p. 141. In his biography of Alexander, Staring shows a correspondence between Alexander's idea of optimal foot positioning for balance and Moses True Brown's idea of optimal foot positioning for balance. See the Mourtz edition of Alexander's *Man's Supreme Inheritance* pages 168ff and Jeroen Staring (1996, 1997), *The First 43 Years of the Life of F. Matthias Alexander, Volumes 1 and 2*. Nijmegen, The Netherlands.

11. Murray, A. (1995). "The 3rd Annual F.M. Alexander Memorial Lecture: F.M. Alexander's Teaching: Our Supreme Inheritance." *NASTAT NEWS*, No. 29, pp 13-16.

In 1895, Loisette planned to go back to the States with Alexander. That is, Alexander and Loisette were planning to tour together in the United States. But then Alexander's mother left his father with two of his sisters. He was on his way to the United States in 1896 but when he stopped off in Melbourne, Alexander realized he would have to take care of his mother and two sisters, as they, in all probability had fled his father in Hobart, Tasmania. He stayed in Australia. Or else he would have been better known in America than in England. And he would have been known as a breathing teacher rather than a posture teacher.

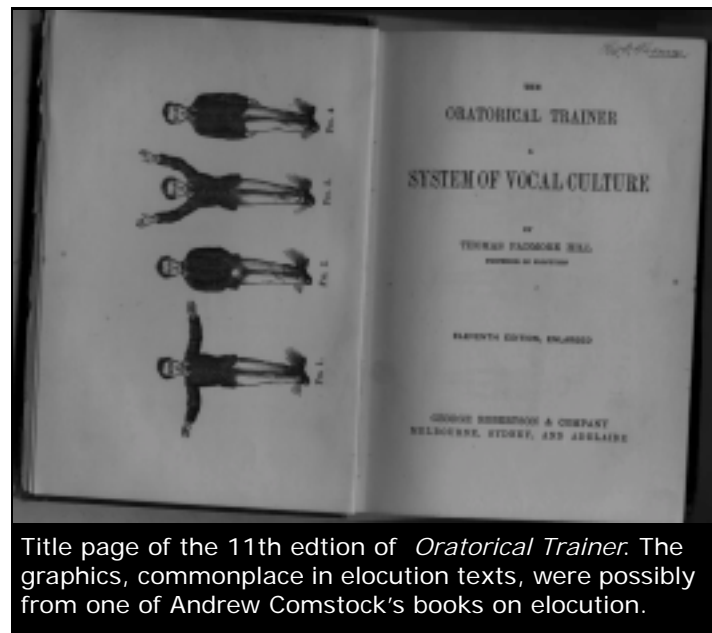
**Audience:** What is your source for that?

**Staring:** Oh, McLeod's *Up From Down Under* has a material on Loisette. Plus, here is an article by Rodney Mace, an English historian.<sup>13</sup> Mace went to New Zealand and discovered that Alexander, when he was on tour in 1894 and 1895, published at least two newspaper articles. One in 1895 in New Zealand, the other in Hobart, Tasmania, in 1894. When you have this newspaper article by Alexander.

**Audience:** But.

**Jeroen:** No, I will show you.<sup>14</sup>

His son, Hill also, of course, Alexander's teacher. And Alexander, when he wrote these newspaper articles, just stole from F.W. Hill's father's book, Thomas Padmore Hill's *The Oratorical Trainer: A System of Vocal Culture*.



Title page of the 11th edition of *Oratorical Trainer*. The graphics, commonplace in elocution texts, were possibly from one of Andrew Comstock's books on elocution.

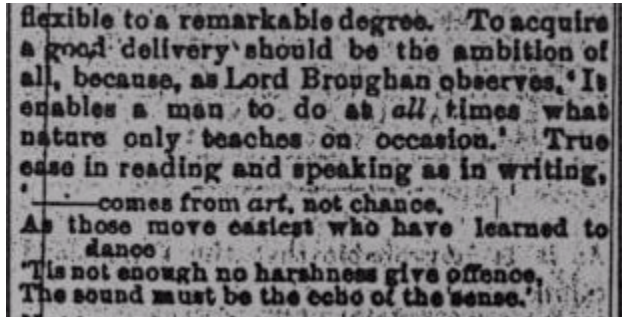
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12. Fellows, George S. (1888). *Loisette Exposed, Together with Loisette's Complete System of Physiological Memory: The Instantaneous Art of Never Forgetting*.

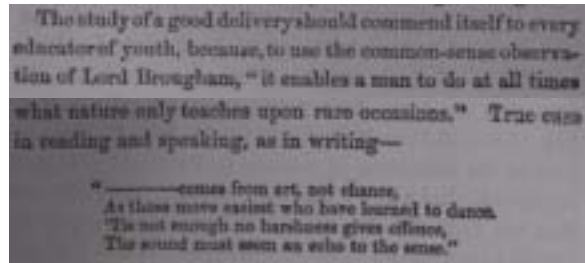
13. See Rodney Mace's article at: [http://ATeducationresearch.com/Mace\\_1996.pdf](http://ATeducationresearch.com/Mace_1996.pdf).

Let's read together these pages. You read Alexander's newspaper article and I read the exact same text in Hill's book, pages 12-13:

Selection from Alexander's 1895  
*Auckland Star* Article



Selection from PT Hill's 1895 *Oratorical Trainer*.



At this I will show it around. Rodney Mace, in his article, also addressed Loisetette. Most of what I have read from Hill's book, Alexander represented as text written by himself. Even before he met Loisetette, Alexander was representing himself as having written something that wasn't his. Borrowing from other people and presenting it as coming from himself was not so uncommon at that time, especially in newspaper advertisements to promote one's teaching practice.

The 1896 book of Loisetette, *Assimilative Memory*, contains the first mention of Alexander in literature. Loisetette's mention of Alexander suggests they were close friends. I have the old text that was given out in America (also in Fellows's book).<sup>15</sup> And this is the book that was published in 1896, when Loisetette went back to America. There is only one new paragraph inserted; it is about a



First page of Alexander's July 20, 1895 article in the *Auckland Star*. Original copy made available thanks to Rosslyn McLeod.

14. Jeroen shows them a copy of book by Thomas Padmore Hill, the father of Alexander's elocution teacher. Noting that T.P. Hill had been the most influential elocution teacher in Australia, Jeroen handed two audience members a copy of Alexander's 1895 *Auckland Star* article, which was first uncovered by historian Rodney Mace (see Mace's article on this site). Jeroen then read aloud from the text of Hill's *Oratorical Trainer* while the audience members followed the text in Alexander's article.

We want to thank Rosslyn McCleod for making available a photo copy of Alexander's *Auckland Star* newspaper article.

15. It is the same text as in the pre-1888 Loisetette booklets, which is reprinted in Fellows's book.

teacher of Moses True Brown's system of elocution. Alexander is the only teacher that Loisetette could have known.

[In the 1896 text], Loisetette writes:

Suppose a teacher of the Art of Expression has studied Moses True Brown's reduction of Delsarte's nine laws of gesture to Brown's one law of correspondence. And suppose this teacher wishes to explain this to his class or to his audience how Mr. Brown proceeded.<sup>16</sup>

Now Mr. Brown was a Boston teacher of Delsarte and had published a book on Darwin, Montegazza, and Delsarte on the Philosophy of Expression. It is titled *The Synthetic Philosophy of Expression*.

So at that time, 1895 in New Zealand, Alexander must have known Brown because Loisetette, one year later in his book mentions a teacher who knows the work of Moses True Brown. How did Alexander know, in all probability, Moses True Brown?

We find in Thomas Padmore Hill's book, from whom Alexander borrowed text, that Moses True Brown is cited by Hill. I have the eleventh edition. 1893. In 1895, Alexander mentioned it on the last page of the newspaper article, where he quotes from Hill's book but failed to cite Hill in that place in his 1895 article. Alexander must have bought the 1895, that is, the 12<sup>th</sup> edition of Hill's book, because in another place in that same article by Alexander, he does cite the 12<sup>th</sup> edition of Hill's book.

In that 12<sup>th</sup> edition, Hill makes a citation to a New York organist by the name of Leo Kofler (not yet mentioned in the 11<sup>th</sup> edition). He was a German who, in his own words had come "to the land of the free," as you all know it's called the land of the free and the brave. Kofler came to New York from Berlin to be an organist (at St. Paul's) and to give singing lessons. Kofler wrote a book on what he had learned from the old Italian singing

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16. Elocutionist Moses True Brown (1827-1900) was a follower of Steel MacKaye (1842-1894), the American actor and (and possibly the actual) developer of a system of movements and exercises that MacKaye promoted as the Delsarte System of Expression. From 1866-1884, Brown held the Chair of Oratory at Tufts University in Boston. See Nancy Lee Chalfa Ruyter's *The Cultivation of Body and Mind in Nineteenth-Century American Delsartism*, Greenwood Press, 1999, pp 25-27; available at amazon.com: <http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/search-handle-form/104-8532673-1523131>. Loisetette's mention of "Brown's one law of correspondence" is a Delsartean-Swedenborgian concept of unity between "inner" and "outer," manifest in Delsarte-MacKaye-Brown voice training in their emphasis on a unity between body and mind.

techniques. And it is this book, called depending on the edition, either *The Art of Breathing* (later editions), or *The Old Italian School of Singing* (first edition).

How to breathe. Alexander had to know of the work of Leo Kofler and Moses True Brown. They all were mentioned in Hill's book. Alexander was very interested in breathing techniques because he himself had had difficulties with breathing. And was trying to find a way to avoid his breathing difficulties. He found the solution in this booklet of Leo Kofler.

Kofler describes the “abdominal breathing” — as we have heard explained from Jessica [Wolf].<sup>17</sup> At the turn of the century, there were two main schools of breathing, the Lamperti school of breathing (advocated by Francesco Lamperti of Milan who taught it to some German teachers who taught other German teachers) and there was the Manuel Garcia school of breathing.

In England there was another teacher, a student of Francesco Lamperti, named William Shakespeare, actually. He was a tenor. Leo Kofler was one of the exponents of the abdominal breathing technique. He learned a lot from Oskar Guttmann, also a German living in the States, I guess in New York. Guttmann wrote *Gymnastics of the Voice*.

That is why I gave you the twenty questions: One of them is “What is antagonistic action?”<sup>18</sup>

Is someone willing to answer?

**Audience:** Unintelligible [related to postural muscle balance in standing, etc.]

**Staring:** No

**Audience 2:** Unintelligible [related to postural definition of antagonistic action, as in reciprocal inhibition]

**Staring:** No, antagonistic action as Alexander used it in 1906 and 1907 is in fact, the action then conceived by Alexander as antagonizing the diaphragm. The muscle action antagonizing the diaphragm is the action antagonizing the belly wall muscles. That is in

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17. Jeroen here refers to Jessica Wolf's workshop on breathing at the ACAT AGM on Sunday, February 10, 2002. As well as an Alexander Technique teacher, Jessica was also a student of Carl Stough, a New York City voice teacher, for 20 years. Of course, Jessica explained her understanding of abdominal breathing.

18. On Sunday, February 10, 2002, at the ACAT AGM, Jeroen had handed out twenty questions on the history of the Alexander Technique to stimulate discussion for his lecture.

fact abdominal breathing. If you breath in, you relax your belly wall. The diaphragm descends a little bit. Once you breathe out you have to contract your bellywall muscles and you press against the diaphragm, in fact against the contents of your belly, of course, and those press against the diaphragm and you breathe out. That is antagonistic action.

In *Gymnastics of the Voice*, Guttman used the phrase antagonistic action. So the concept was not invented by Alexander.

Guttman wrote in his 1882 book:

The stronger the antagonistic action of the abdominal muscles and the diaphragm, the greater is the pressure on the air on the lungs and the louder the air and the tone.

Here, is the origin of antagonistic action:

In the 1882 *Gymnastics of the Voice*, Guttman described antagonistic action. That is, he first described it in Germany, in the 1870's, only a few years after Alexander was born (in 1869).

**Audience:** As far as I know, I don't know where Alexander talked about antagonistic action [in texts] on breathing. But he talked about it in one place, where the head goes forward, the [pause] back [pause] that's where I remember him using the phrase antagonistic action.

**Staring:** No

**Audience:** He does use it in that way. He may use it in breathing. He also uses it in the way that I describe.

**Staring:** No

**Audience:** He does.

**Staring:** No. If you can produce the text, okay if you have it here.

[audience member looks for the reference in ACAT's bookshelf].

Staring continues:

Mr. [Walter] Carrington says in his 1992 book *Explaining the Alexander Technique*

"The first thing I'd like to say is that, although he wrote 'antagonistic muscular actions', in everyday conversation he'd use the term 'antagonistic pulls'.<sup>19</sup>

That is the way Jessica Wolf uses the term. She makes a mistake as well because she is following Carrington. The mistake that antagonistic.

**Audience:** What is the mistake?

**Staring:** That ‘antagonistic muscular actions’ means the same thing in Alexander’s texts as ‘antagonistic pulls.’

The antagonistic action is not a “pull”, it is a contraction, it is not a pulling.

Carrington, in the same book, also says about the “true primary movement” (that is, a term also used by Alexander in his early, pre 1910 texts) is the same as the head has to go up. That is a misinterpretation of what Alexander meant. Carrington says in his 1994 book *Thinking Aloud*:

“In Man’s Supreme Inheritance, [Alexander] talks about the primary movement, and the primary movement is, of course, up. I remember so well being struck by it when I first read it. The primary movement is up. You initiate the movement by undoing the catch, by taking the brake off. You’ve this ongoing flow of energy that is seeking to take you up against all the downward forces, and going up is what happens when you release the neck.<sup>20</sup>

That is where Mr. Carrington errs.

**Audience:** That was Carrington speaking.

**Staring:** Yes.

This is how Alexander describes “true primary movement” in his 1907 booklet “The Theory and Practice of a New Method of Respiratory Re-Education:”

In other words it is essential to have a proper mental attitude towards respiratory education or re-education, and the specific acts which constitute the exercises embodied in it, together with the proper knowledge and practical employment of the true primary movement in each and every act” (Alexander, 1907).<sup>21</sup>

**What is this “true primary movement”? It is breathing. Remember, [at the time] Alexander was a breathing teacher! He was not an Alexander Technique teacher as we know it today. He was a breathing teacher. This 1907 text is on breathing.**

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19.Carrington, W. and Carey, S. (1992). *Explaining the Alexander Technique*. The Sheildrake Press, London.

20.Carrington Walter (1994). *Thinking Aloud: Talks on Teaching the Alexander Technique*, edited by Jerry Songtag. Mornum Time Press, San Francisco.

21.See: *F. Matthias Alexander: Articles and Lectures* (JMO Fischer ed.),

The primary movement of the body as Alexander then defined it in 1907 is the air going in and the air going out. That is the cycle which Jessica Wolf also discussed in her lecture Sunday [February 10, 2002]. That, in fact, is the primary movement of the body according to Alexander in the early 1900s. It's breathing in and out, in and out.

If then Carrington says "the primary movement is going up," that is a misinterpretation of what Alexander's texts actually said. With his knowledge of Alexander's teacher [pause for question]

**Audience:** I'm sure it was Alexander's point that going up was consistent with the breathing.

**Staring:** Not at that time.

**Bouchard:** The confusion here is about the years. In 1906 and 1907, Alexander appears to be talking about breathing and not about the head and neck, not about "going up." When, around 1907, he talked about the primary movement he is talking about breathing. His only instruction related to hands-on intervention in 1906 is to put one's hand on the pit of the stomach. Today, that's a very unAlexander expression.

**Staring to Audience 1:** You are looking up the reference to antagonistic action in the Jean Fischer book. That's good because Jean Fischer is really stupid on that.

**Audience:** Who is stupid.

**Staring:** Fischer, because he really misinterprets almost everything. So that is a warning, not a qualification of Fischer.

**Audience 1:** Here Alexander "directs the head forward, ... to get the pulls."

**Staring:** That is a 1923 text that you quote from. It discusses antagonistic pulls, not antagonistic action.<sup>22</sup> Now look up antagonistic action in the index. You will see that it is only mentioned in the 1907 text.

**Audience:** It doesn't matter what he used.

**Staring:** No, the word comes from Oskar Guttman.

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<sup>22</sup>.See page ?? of *FMA Articles and Lectures*

**Audience:** What's the difference?

**Staring:** The difference is that when you read the 1906 and 1907 texts and try to see what [understanding you derive] when you interpret it from a contemporary point of view, as you know when you bring someone out of the chair, then the antagonistic action is what Alex Murray and Jean Fisher and others are saying, that is the “pulls” of the head away from the pelvis, head away from the neck. These antagonistic pulls ...

And then you try to explain the 1906 and 1907 texts that are specifically on breathing. And then you can't explain.

**Audience:** I don't see what point you are making. When people are developing, they can use different terminology in completely different contexts.

**Staring:** They do. But once you follow the man, you have to see the difference. In 1907, he is talking about breathing.

**Audience:** Right.

**Staring:** But in 1923, he is talking about something different.

**Audience:** I knew he changed. He started out as a breathing teacher, then he realized [something new] something different. It doesn't really matter that he took terminology that happened to stay the same and used it differently.

**Staring:** No, it's not the same words. Antagonistic pulls is different from antagonistic action.

**Audience:** Then what's the point. I'm not exactly sure what the point is.

**Staring:** One of my questions on the hand out last Sunday is “Do you know what antagonistic action means”? You don't know!

**Audience:** What Alexander means

**Staring:** Yes, what Alexander meant in his texts, at the date he wrote them. In 1906 and 1907, Alexander's “antagonistic action” referred to breathing.

**Audience:** I was just talking about the way he used “antagonistic action” here.

**Audience 4:** [unintelligible]

**Audience 5:** Alexander used words in many different contexts.

**Staring:** Yes.

**Audience 5:** That's the case with very well developed concepts like inhibition. He has used it in four or five different contexts. There will be contentious discussions within the Alexander Technique community about what Alexander meant by inhibition.

**Audience 6:** I'm sort of curious about your point. You are talking about antagonistic action and antagonistic pulls, I'm trying to follow you and I'm not exactly sure where you are now.

**Staring:** I'm still at the point where Alexander described himself as a breathing teacher. And as a breathing teacher, which he was up to 1908 or so, phrases in his writing and talks about his method were about breathing and nothing else.

**Audience 4:** Alexander was forty years old then, not 20.

**Staring:** Yes, he is then using phrases and words that were common in the breathing and singing literature of that period.

**Audience 1:** Sure.

**Staring:** Okay, and antagonistic action has come from "antagonistic action" by Oskar Guttmann, but even Guttmann was not the real inventor of that concept. Neumann, in 1859, was the first to use that construct as antagonistic action in his German book on *The Art of Breathing of Man*. There is the first time the term antagonistic action was used in breathing literature.

Let us discuss Alexander's concept of "the position of mechanical advantage" before 1910 and in the 1910 *Man's Supreme Inheritance* as well. Do you have Jean Fischer's editions of *Articles and Letters* and *Man's Supreme Inheritance* here? Perhaps you can find the passage. There is an interesting part on "the position of mechanical advantage" which Alexander added to the 1908 article on "Re-Education of the Kinaesthetic Systems Concerned with the Development of Robust Physical Well-being" when he republished this text to the 1910 *Man's Supreme Inheritance*. Here Alexander is talking about "the position of mechanical advantage," and here we come to Alexander's exact technique of breathing. He stated, in my words, 'If you breath out and have muscles working against

your diaphragm, at the end of expiration, then contract your belly muscles even stronger.’

**Audience1:** Alexander said that at this point?

**Staring:** Yes, but in a very obscure way of talking because he didn’t want to give away his technique. He wrote:

“ The Doctrines of Antagonistic Action and Mechanical Advantage.

...

In the process of creating a co-ordination one psycho-physical factor provides a position of rigidity by means of which the moving parts are held to the mode in which their function is carried on.

This psycho-physical factor also constitutes a steady and firm condition which enables the Directive Agent of the sphere of consciousness to discriminate the action of the kinaesthetic and motion agents which it must maintain without any interference or discontinuity.

The whole condition which thus obtains is termed ‘antagonistic action,’ and the attitude of rigidity essential as a factor in the process is called the position of ‘mechanical advantage.’<sup>23</sup>

**Audience 1:** You don’t think that was Alexander’s later idea of breathing, I hope?

**Staring:** I don’t know. Do you know?

**Audience 1:** Let me give you an example of one of his little aphorisms.

At last I see, if I don’t breathe, I breathe.

He was very, [pause] you can’t breathe if you reduce breathing to a set of muscular contractions that you do consciously. The whole point of the technique is that you can’t breathe by deciding when to breathe differently. You have to re-co-ordinate the body and breathing comes about accordingly. You can’t breathe well by deciding to contract this or that muscle. That’s not the Alexander Technique. He may have said something about that earlier on but he certainly didn’t later.

**Staring:** Yes. Well, that’s it.

**Audience:** Well he changed.

**Staring:** I’m not arguing that he didn’t.

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23. In the Centerline 1988 reprint of the 1910 edition of *Man’s Supreme Inheritance*, p 60.

**Audience:** His later technique has nothing to do with breathing.

**Staring:** I'm not saying that.

**Audience:** It seems that you are trying to trace everything to show that he got his ideas from somewhere else, when it is a developing process, things from different cultures. That's what everyone does. You are using English. I am using English. I didn't steal English.

**Staring:** Well if you use my exact phrases, which came from my mind, that I wrote down in a book, that's stealing. That's plagiarism. And taking phrases from another book and presenting them as if they are your own, that is plagiarism. It is a kind of stealing.

**Audience1 :** That's true.

**Staring:** That's the way I use it. Scientifically.

**Audience 1:** What's the difference. He came up with something so ingenious. He came up with something so ingenious.

**Audience 7:** So, let me clarify here. In concepts related to his early ideas on breathing, that's all we are talking about right now, that Alexander was using phrases that were really in use by other breathing teachers. He just didn't cite his references.

**Staring:** Yes.

**Audience 7:** What you feel like he should have done because it was written.

**Staring:** No. He shouldn't have cited his sources. He was someone who had a double consciousness with authorities. He did what he did. This double consciousness with authorities is that you use them as long as they are helpful to you and then put them aside when they don't help you any more.

**Audience 1:** What is this set of photos supposed to illustrate here?

**Staring:** That is Alexander Technique.

**Audience 1:** It doesn't look like it to me.

**Staring:** No, this is perhaps not, perhaps some other things.

**Audience 1:** I see some.

**Audience 2:** We don't have an old edition of *Man's Supreme Inheritance*.

**Audience 1:** Do you think that the Alexander Technique is getting in and out of the chair with your back straight?

**Audience 8:** What are those pictures from?

**Staring:** Let me finish. The Alexander Technique as you teach it today is a gathering of different things already known, not put together by Alexander, but by his mentor Scanes Spicer and then used by Alexander.

**Audience 1:** I'm sorry if you study the technique seriously, you know it is something so far beyond anything that you can put together. It is really, I'm sorry, but it is kind of absurd to describe it that way. If you spend years studying it, you realize it takes all of your effort and thought and intelligence to learn it. And you can barely do it without help. I'm stealing the technique. It has already been done by others and put in books. But to learn it for myself, takes years. I don't care if he stole every single idea.

**Staring:** Then I ask you not to disturb my lecture.

**Audience 1:** But I did it because you started out with the antagonistic action and felt [pause] I felt it gave me a license.

**Staring:** No, I say that if you interpret what Alexander meant by antagonistic action in 1907, saying these are the antagonistic pulls he referred to in 1923, then you misinterpret it, that is all that I said. And misinterpretations like that are done rather regularly within the Alexander Technique community of teachers. That is why you have to be very alert, like you are, very critical, on everything. But especially to your teachers and to your colleagues. Not to me, but to your teachers, who are only parroting other Alexander Technique teachers, not doing research like I did. Okay.

Now let us get back to the books I brought with me.

**Audience 2:** I'd just like to say. I don't think it is fair to characterize other Alexander teachers as parroting. I think it is an initiatory process. It proceeds with the intelligence of each individual who is initiated into it. And people who discover unquantifiable elements, which are subjectively verifiable within their own system, which have meaning for them. So I don't think that parroting is an appropriate formulation for them.

**Staring:** No.

**Audience 2:** I'm talking about formulations, which you might disagree with.

**Staring:** Like Jessica Wolf, she clearly is repeating formulations that Carrington said. I can show it around. So you can read all about that here. Let me see.

You have Jessica's meaning on antagonistic pulls, that is exactly what has been said here, but as an interpretation of the breathing texts. Now, she gave a lecture on breathing. Now was it on breathing or was it a misinterpretation of Alexander's breathing texts? The pulls idea, that is not Jessica's. If you go to the Alexander Technique literature, you will find the first misinterpretations in texts by Murray, Fischer, Carrington. They speak almost with one voice. They say the same. That is why I say parroting. I don't mean that all Alexander Technique teachers are parroting other teachers. But the criticism should be placed and directed at Alexander Technique teachers. Because you all share almost the same body of knowledge and not something like I am presenting here from outside this body of knowledge. This is, what I am presenting here, has always been the case within the Alexander Technique community. There are people who have had criticism on Alexander, like the writer H.G. Wells.

Wells, in his 1936 novel *Apropos of Dolores*, presents the widow of Alexander, a certain Mrs Bunnington:

'Mr. Bunnington was a Mind Healer,' she said. 'He began as an osteopath, but after-wards he became a Mind Healer — with Physical Exercises. Perhaps you do not know. But he was well known. He had a large practice before he passed over. He had quite a lot of distinguished men, artists, and writers and that sort of man doing his neck exercises. He taught them how to swan (!?) [sic] Swan, you know — like swans. Swanning exercises. Some of them swan now quite beautifully. He was writing a book about it when he died.'

...He had found he was able to advise people and help people. Gradually he had come to realize that the body and mind of a man, in health, were his Supreme Inheritance.

... She repeated the phrase with gusto. She pressed it upon me. She evidently found it good and wanted me to savour of its full beauty. 'Man's Supreme Inheritance!'

... I was tempted to comment. 'Another of your husband's original phrases, I presume? They must have been extensively quoted. It is certainly true, I remarked, 'that we inherit ourselves.'<sup>24</sup>

This is of course, artistic, poetic license. Wells was writing sarcastically about Alexander and his parroting followers. Now what does Carrington say about Wells?

**Audience:** This is fiction?

**Staring:** Yes, this is fiction, an H.G. Wells novel on Alexander. This a woman speaking to the “I” character (the author), and the “I” character replying. So, Wells presents a dialogue. But Carrington presents it as a monologue. He takes the ridicule out of Wells and presents it as a monologue, as something different. Please read what Carrington, in his book *Explaining the Alexander Technique*, says about HG Wells’s novel, *Apropos of Dolores*:

“Wells had certainly read MSI, because one of the characters in his novel is based on Alexander’s ‘wife’. She speaks about her husband and his work – ‘his supreme inheritance’ – and goes on, ‘And so it is I suppose in a way that we all inherit ourselves’<sup>25</sup>

Now read again yourself what HG Wells wrote. You will notice a completely different version. Now if I were to ask any group of Alexander Technique teachers “What did Wells write about Alexander?” then probably they will most likely repeat what Carrington wrote HG Wells said. That is not what Wells himself wrote. It is even completely the opposite of what Wells himself wrote. This is what I understand parroting to be.

That is, if you study Carrington and Fischer on Alexander, then you have to study the sources from whence they took their information. Fischer mentions Leo Kofler, the organist at St. Paul’s Cathedral here in New York City. Where did Fischer find that source?<sup>26</sup> From Rodney Mace’s article on Alexander’s early influences. That is all that Fischer did as research on Leo Kofler. He didn’t go further. He didn’t read Kofler. He didn’t get fresh knowledge. New new links with what was known in literature. So, when you read Fischer’s notes in *Articles and Lectures* and his edition of *Man’s Supreme*

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24. Wells, H.G., (1946) *Apropos of Dolores*, Alfred Scherz Publishers, Berne, Switzerland, pp. 191–196).

25. Carrington, Walter, and Carey, Sean (1992). *Explaining the Alexander Technique: The Writings of FM Alexander*. The Sheildrake Press, London.

26. In footnote 24 in Mace’s 1994 article Mace writes “Leo Kofler was the organist at St Paul’s Chapel in New York and a great supporter of Italian style of singing much vaunted in America at the time.” Fischer’s footnote number 20 on page 264 of *A&I*, Fischer writes “Leo Kofler was an organist at St Paul’s Chapel in New York who encouraged the Italian style of singing.” Fischer does cite Mace as the source for this information.

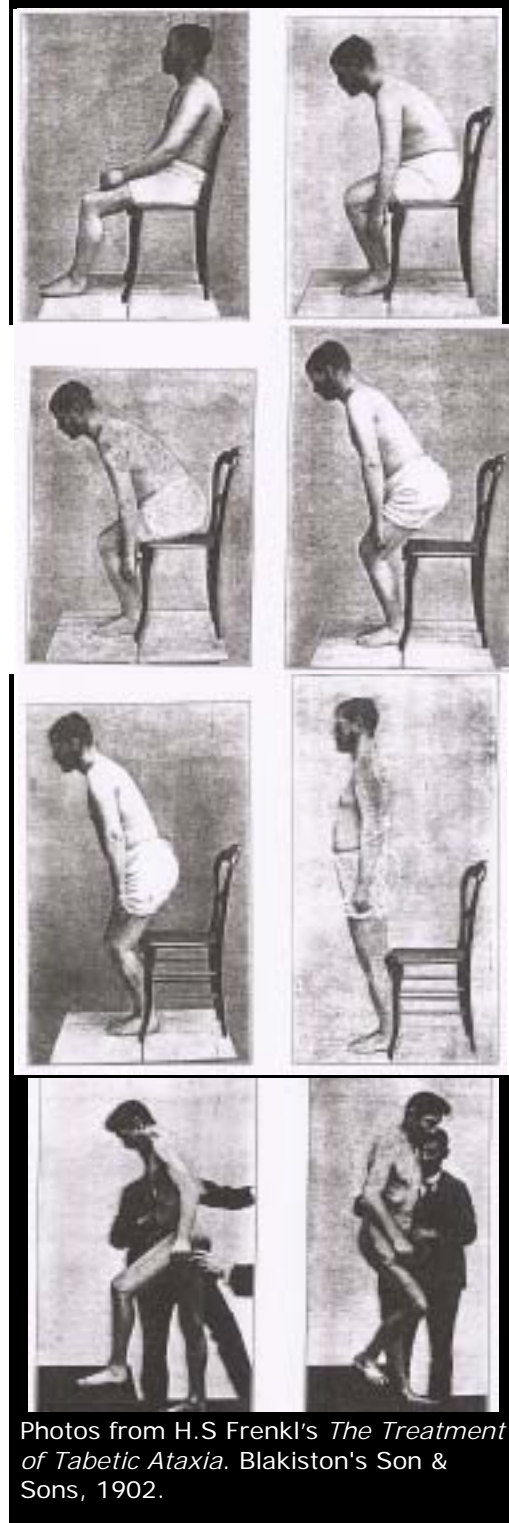
*Inheritance*, if you don't go any further into the literature to reach an informed understanding than the secondary, perfunctory opinion that Fischer provides, it becomes your opinion.

Fischer's information explains a little bit but it doesn't provide fresh knowledge, other understandings, new links that can lead to a new understanding, connecting links, to use an Irene Tasker expression, about what is known in the literature by researchers beyond the insular Alexander Technique community.

Regarding the photographs that I gave you of a man standing up from a chair that several of you have been asking about: They are of someone who has tabetic ataxia. That is, a fault in his coordination, physical coordination, because he had syphilis, rather, the third-stage of syphilis where syphilis is attacking the dorsal, the posterior roots of the spinal nerves (going to the muscles and returning from the senses).

That is, a patient with tabetic ataxia has no sensory awareness or kinesthesia. He or she cannot feel what he/she is doing. He/she cannot feel his/her position or his/her movement. When you cannot feel movement, you cannot move. You will fall to the ground.

But H.S. Frenkl, the MD also shown in the photograph, was a Swiss physician and medical superintendent of the Freihoff Sanatorium in Switzerland. He developed a treatment for tabetic ataxia by means of systematic exercise. He taught tabetic ataxia patients to think out a movement before performing it. The only sense available to these patients are the



Photos from H.S Frenkl's *The Treatment of Tabetic Ataxia*. Blakiston's Son & Sons, 1902.

eyes. These patients, before treatment, could not move. But once they had instruction from Frenkl, who taught them to think out the movement before moving, they could move again, within 3 hours time.

**Audience3:** Could you say his name again.

**Staring:** His name, Frenkl, is in the photocopies I passed around. Ah yes, here you have a series a photographs taken of patients coming out of the chair. They cannot feel they are coming out of the chair. Now, that is, in fact, the Alexander Technique of today. You have to think out your movement before doing the movement.

**Audience2:** What is Frenkl's link to Alexander? How did he Alexander get influenced?

**Staring:** Let me come back to the story. Loisetete, we have covered. Alexander went on to become a Delsarte teacher, a teacher on elocution. He also quoted but failed to cite, or stole from Genevieve Stebbins, who was a Delsarte teacher here in the United States. She was also a pupil of the singing teacher William Shakespeare. That is, she went to England to have lessons from William Shakespeare, the tenor and singing teacher, who was one of the propagators of abdominal breathing in England. Shakespeare had the same line of thought on breathing as Leo Kofter, Oskar Guttmann and other teachers. This form of abdominal breathing was also known, to quote the tenor Shakespeare, as "nature's way of breathing," since they believed that they were simply making their pupils aware of the most efficient natural way of breathing.<sup>27</sup> The competing school of breathing for singers was that of Manuel Garcia and Charles Lunn and others in England who taught, instead, that a specialized manner of breathing and breathing exercises are required for singing. That is, when you *inhale*, at the end of inspiration, Garcia says, when the diagram contracts completely, then, "while the stomach is drawn in" you breathe in by expanding "from side to side, front to back, from top to bottom."<sup>28</sup>

In 1906 and 1907, Alexander's school of breathing instead said that if you breathe in you have to loosen up your belly muscles, allow the diaphragm to descend, let the ribs expand. Then, as you *exhale*, you have to contract your belly muscles so that the dia-

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27. Shakespeare, William. (1898). *The Art of Singing*, Publisher, MacMillan and Co., London, 1920 edition.

28. Garcia, Manuel (1894). *Hints on Singing: Translated from the French by Beata Garcia*. Joseph Patelson Music House Limited, New York reprint of the New and Revised 1910 Edition. 1982, pp 4-5.

phragm is pushed up as the air is exhaled. The addition of Alexander is this. At the end of exhalation, you re-contract your belly muscles. Then you have the position of mechanical advantage for breathing in again. Because if you really contract your belly muscles at the end of expiration, you just try, and then release the belly muscles in an instance, you have the air just flowing in as in a spontaneous gasp. Because the diaphragm is descending from itself. The position of mechanical advantage is doing that. And then you breathe in.

This addition to the general practice, made by Alexander, he had, in fact, taken from a pupil of William Shakespeare's, William Aikin,<sup>29</sup> in his 1900 book *The Voice* [revised in 1910].

If you read Alexander's 1906 and 1907 texts on breathing and study the medical journals of that period, you will see that William Aikin is Alexander's main source for those texts on breathing. Other sources are William Shakespeare's *The Art of Singing* [1898], Leo Kofler's *The Old Italian School of Singing* [1883], Oskar Guttmann, and others. That is where Alexander obtained his knowledge. But he presented it as a "new method" of breathing. It was not a new method at all. But mainly a method, at best, renewed by Alexander.

When Alexander Technique teachers of today read the 1910 texts of *Man's Supreme Inheritance*, and come to the phrase "position of mechanical advantage," if they do not know the breathing literature of the period, and interpret the phrase as a position of mechanical advantage related to posture, which was Alexander's later meaning of the term, then they cannot figure out what he is saying on mechanical advantage prior to 1910. But if you know the text, you know it is in fact about breathing. And if you know what the contemporary definition of mechanical advantage in fact was, that is, the diaphragm is pushed up by the abdominal muscles at the end of expiration by the belly wall muscles, then you can see that Alexander clearly refers to the mechanical advantage for the start of inhalation. Then you understand what Alexander meant by position of mechanical advantage in those texts.

In later texts, he meant something different, of course.

29. William Aikin, a leading respiratory medical specialist in London, wrote *The Voice*, Longmans Green, and Co., London, 1910. Although Aikin was not cited, phrases in Alexander's July 14, 1906 pamphlet *Introduction to a New Method of Respiratory Education* closely echo Aikin's "Report of a Paper on the Scientific Aspects of Voice Development," *The Lancet*, January 27, 1906, pp 267-268.

The 1906, 1907, and 1910 texts remained texts on breathing throughout his life. If you interpret it as texts on posture, as Carrington does, as Fischer does, as Murray does, then you don't understand what Alexander is saying.

If you then present what you are doing as the Alexander Technique, then you are not understanding what you are teaching.

When he was still in Australia, from his newspaper advertisements, we know that Alexander was a breathing teacher and a Delsarte teacher. The advertisements were collected and published by Rosslyn McLeod in her excellently researched book *Up From Down Under*. We also learn from Alexander Murray's article<sup>30</sup> that Alexander had used Genevieve Stebbins's *The Delsarte System of Expression*. In between the fourth and fifth edition of Stebbins's book on Delsarte, Stebbins went to London to study with William Shakespeare, the London tenor. In the fourth edition, Shakespeare's name is still not in the book. After 1902, in the 5th and 6th editions, Shakespeare's name appears.

So Alexander knew about Shakespeare. Because, in his Sydney time, he used or borrowed or stole phrases from Stebbins's book without giving her credit. In 1898, Shakespeare's book was sold in Melbourne in Collin's Music Shop, where Alexander's first pamphlet was distributed. No copy remains of Alexander 1898 pamphlet. But we know that it was sold in Collin's Music Shop. See Fischer's book. That was the only place where Shakespeare's book was sold in Australia. Thus, Alexander was probably already aware of Shakespeare's [breathing] method by 1898.

In 1904, Alexander went to England, where he met Dr. Robert Henry Scanes Spicer. He was an ear/throat/nose specialist who treated many singers and actors. He introduced Alexander to the theatre. Via Scanes Spicer's endorsement of Alexander's method of teaching breathing, Alexander was able to gain a substantial teaching practice among the London theatre community.

In the Alexander Technique literature that we all know, Henry Irving is listed as one of Alexander's students. Further, that Henry Irving endorsed Alexander's method. That

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30. Murray, Alex (1995). "The 3rd Annual F.M. Alexander Memorial Lecture, F.M. Alexander's Teaching: Our Supreme Inheritance." North American Society of Teachers of the Alexander Technique (NASTAT) Annual General Meeting, in *NASTAT News*, N. 29. pp 13-16.

is untrue. When Alexander met Irving, in London in 1905, Irving was in advanced, end-stage of, in all probability, tuberculosis. At the end of 1906, Henry Irving died.

At that time, it was a common practice to go to a very influential person to ask for an endorsement letter from that person. In all probability, that is what Alexander did with Irving. However, there is very little probability that Alexander gave lessons to Henry Irving. We do know that he asked Irving for a letter of endorsement, but that is all.

When we research Alexander's life and Irving's life, we know that Alexander could have only met Irving in January of 1905, when Irving was gravely ill. If Alexander helped Irving, as he claimed he did in his 1925 lecture "An Unrecognized Principle in Human Behaviour",<sup>31</sup> then it should show somewhere in the literature on Irving that his health improved. But that is not the case. Irving only worsened.

Dr. Scanes Spicer was not only interested in ears, noses and throats but in all of the breathing practices that were practiced at that time. He was among the few ENT surgeons in England at that time who saw that if patients did not have some kind of physical therapy, their recovery from surgery took longer.

He looked for breathing teachers that he could trust, so that his patients would recover sooner. He did have lessons from Alexander, approved of his method, and hence forward, sent him patients. The relationship was a mutually beneficial. Alexander helped Scanes Spicer with his patients' therapy. And Scanes Spicer helped Alexander build a teaching practice when he first arrived in London, especially among actors. This relationship lasted until 1908.

Early in 1908, Alexander was engaged in all manner of things. He was writing a play with Evelyn Glover. She was probably his lover. They coauthored a play, *A Question of Time*, which was almost staged. Later, in her 1938 book *Cats and My Camera*, she wrote a lengthy mention of Alexander that suggests she still loved him in 1938, although she likely hadn't seen him for years. Also in 1908, Alexander met with Alexander Leeper, the Australian teacher in classics who came to England to investigate breathing teachers and physical education teachers, in order to select what would be used in the Australian public school system. Later, Leeper wrote a report on his investigations. Early in 1908, the

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31.A&E, page 141ff.

*Pall Mall Gazette* published an article on tuberculosis and breathing by its medical editor. At that time, the British Government was preparing a report on how to best treat tuberculosis. That is, whether tuberculosis would be best treated in sanatoria, by medication, by breathing instruction, and so forth.

The medical editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette* introduced the subject with an unsigned article on deep breathing practices. This was followed by a series of letters to the editor from the Ars Vivendi [The Art of Life] breathing school. Ars Vivendi was competition for Alexander. The founder of Ars Vivendi, Arthur Lovell, in fact wrote a book titled *Deep Breathing*. In the Alexander Technique literature, for instance, Fischer's commentary in *Articles and Letters*, it is said that Alexander wrote his letter on deep breathing to the *Pall Mall Gazette* to indicate that deep breathing is what one should not do.<sup>32</sup> That is, Fischer, Carrington and others have said that Alexander's article condemned deep breathing. That is not the case.

Instead, interpret this way. The *Pall Mall Gazette* medical editor wrote an article on deep breathing and tuberculosis. The competing school of breathing at the time in London wrote articles to the editor in order to promote themselves. Somebody, perhaps even Leeper from Australia (who was in England early March 1908), encouraged Alexander to write an article as well. At any rate, Alexander's letter attacked Arthur Lovell and the Ars Vivendi school. However, Alexander did not argue against deep breathing, he only argued against Lovell and his school. This dispute, in fact, continued in the press through the summer of 1908. Indeed, pupils of Arthur Lovell's and Alexander's almost seem to be having a contest to prove who was the best teacher of breathing, Lovell or Alexander. In the newspaper, they presented a contest. We will have a contest. At that time, the medical editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette* ended the discussion before a contest could in fact take place. But, from February in 1908 to September in 1908, there were numerous letters<sup>33</sup> from Lovell, Alexander, pupils of Lovell, pupils of Alexander, fighting each other.

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32.A&E, page 72.

33.Staring is preparing an article on this exchange of letters to the editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette* containing all texts.

Who was the medical editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*? It was Caleb Williams Saleeby. He is the author the 1904 article on playing Cricket that, today, almost seems that it could have been written by Alexander. It's on inhibition.

**Audience 8:** I knew it wasn't by Alexander because of the short sentences.<sup>34</sup>

**Staring:** These are short sentences. Saleeby was a professional writer. Still, the content is almost the same as Alexander. It says that the inhibiting part is the most important part. Saleeby's article was published in 1904, in his book titled *The Cycle of Life According to Modern Science*, nearly four years before Alexander even used the term, not to mention the concept of inhibition.

About 1908, Alexander split with Scanes Spicer. He also appears to have befriended Saleeby, who became his new mentor. Alexander learned a lot from Saleeby. If you study Saleeby's books, e.g., his 1909 *Parenthood and Race Culture*, which is on eugenics, on physical exercise, you can see that Alexander is in fact parroting Saleeby in *Man's Supreme Inheritance*.

The first edition of *Man's Supreme Inheritance* is not on the Alexander Technique at all. It is on evolution, on eugenics. Because Alexander had the idea, if you help people change their habits of inhibiting, then they can have better children. In fact, that is what Alexander is saying in *Man's Supreme Inheritance*.

Saleeby was not only the medical editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, he was also an editor of Methuen, the publisher of *Man's Supreme Inheritance*.<sup>35</sup> Saleeby, I argue, helped Alexander write *Man's Supreme Inheritance*. Alexander had help from two people. He had help from John Beresford, which is admitted by Carrington and Fischer — and, from the content and structure of the text, we can see that he had help from Caleb Saleeby. Not just help, ghost writing. If you see all of the common elements that Saleeby addresses in his books and Alexander does in *Man's Supreme Inheritance*, not just the content but the

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34. Copies of the Saleeby chapter on cricket were distributed by Staring at the ACAT AGM on Sunday, February, 10, 2002. Saleeby develops an idea of inhibition that runs along the same lines that Alexander would articulate later, beginning in 1908 and later texts. See the article on this site.

35. In 1910 when Methuen published *Man's Supreme Inheritance (MSI)*, Saleeby was the Methuen Medical Library Editor.

phrasing and attitude, we can see pervasive and insidious influence of Saleeby in *Man's Supreme Inheritance*, especially the 1910 edition. It's almost the same writer.

**Audience:** Not the long sentences but the ideas.

**Staring:** Yes, the ideas. Of course, Alexander in fact had ideas that differed from Saleeby's. On inhibition, on evolution, on eugenics, they differed — a little bit but not very much. These long sentences, probably are Alexander's. But there are many, many common themes between *Man's Supreme Inheritance* and Saleeby's works. The structure of *Man's Supreme Inheritance* is almost the same as the structure of Saleeby's 1909 *Parenthood and Race Culture*.

**Audience:** This was written before Alexander's book.

**Staring:** Yes, before. When you compare structure, theme, content, phrases, you can see it is almost the same author. It has to be the same author. Of course, I can't prove that. But, examine both texts.

**Audience:** On what basis would you say it is "ghost writing."

**Staring:** That is what Carrington says on Beresford's help, and on this point I believe him. Alexander wrote a piece, then gave it to his ghost writer, Beresford, a professional writer who wrote novels.

**Audience:** That is not ghost writing then.

**Staring:** Then he changed the text and brought in new ideas. For instance, in the 1910 edition, there is a footnote concerning a book of a Belgian author on evolution, titled *La Caverne*. It's in French.<sup>36</sup> It's on a family living in prehistoric times in the woods, having twenty-seven children, etc. It's nonsense. But still, Alexander presents it, in the 1910 edition of *Man's Supreme Inheritance*, as if he had read *La Caverne*, as if he knew the content, as if the novel were on courage.

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36. "Notre Pere de Bois, *La Foret Nuptiale, La Caverne*, par Ray Nyst (Paris, 1900, etc)," 1910 *Man's Supreme Inheritance* footnote to the passage suggesting that the character trait "courage...was a determining factor" in humanity evolving "a dominant type...destined to change the face of the world" (1988 Centerline reprint, page 1).

I have read the whole of *La Caverne*. I, unlike Alexander, do read French. “Courage” is mentioned twice in the book. *La Caverne* is not on courage at all. But Alexander said it was in 1910. He could not read French at all. How did he know? There is no English translation of *La Caverne*. The book was privately published. He couldn’t have known it. That is an influence of Saleeby or Beresford.

**Audience 2:** Yes but what is the basis do you make the statement that Saleeby ghost wrote *Man’s Supreme Inheritance*? I just don’t, I mean I am open to finding out.

**Staring:** Finding out is to read the books of Saleeby. You now have the name. There are some twenty books.

**Audience 1:** You are evading the question.

**Audience 8:** What do you mean by ghost writing? As I understand it, ghost writing is somebody writing for someone else. Or, what I thought I heard you say is that Alexander wrote it and someone else edited it.

**Staring:** It’s not just editing. You can clearly see someone else’s influence. *Man’s Supreme Inheritance* is in between purely Alexander’s texts and Saleeby’s.

**Audience 2:** You are saying, there is a significant influence. As I understand you, Saleeby was the editor.

**Staring:** Yes.

**Audience 9:** I don’t understand. Why would Saleeby?

**Bouchard:** Saleeby was a propagandist for eugenic ideas. He was also a good science writer, able to synthesize ideas from a number different sources. He was able to take important synthesize ideas and research from number of leading scientists of the period and make them understandable for a popular audience.<sup>37</sup> He embraced the works of Sir Francis Galton, Charles Darwin’s first cousin, the father of modern statistics — and the father of eugenics. As a spokesperson for various causes, Saleeby used whatever he could to help popularize ideas that he advocated. If he knew Alexander, he may have thought

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37. These include the constructs of Victorian neurologist Sir John Hughings-Jackson, future Nobel Laureate Sir Charles Sherrington, and the American psychologist William James.

that Alexander's book would help promote either eugenics or his ideas on health and preventive medicine. To advance the eugenics movement, he envisioned two fronts: positive eugenics (marriage selection), negative eugenics<sup>38</sup> (prevention of reproduction among the so-called physically and mentally unfit). A third front of eugenics advocated by Saleeby is "nurtural eugenics," which, in fact, refers more to public health and preventive medicine than eugenics. Although, in Saleeby's texts, it is always advocated as part of the eugenics movement. In that context, Saleeby favorably described a person like Alexander who, in spite of not having medical training, nevertheless had a positive health impact on people who came to him for lessons.

Had not Saleeby been a eugenicist, we might all be reading his texts on preventive medicine. He was a Fabian socialist, a close friend of George Bernard Shaw and a prohibitionist.

**Audience9:** He wrote the ideas, but did not care about.

**Bouchard:** Alexander was not interested in promoting eugenics per se but in promoting his practice. We are so cut off from knowing what the origins of the work are.

**Staring:** Saleeby was very influential at that time. Saleeby was the head of the Eugenics Education Society. He was able to recruit members like Sir Charles Sherrington and later Julian Huxley. Almost everything of eugenics in England was invented by Saleeby. He was almost everywhere. He also is the inventor of the word "smog."

**Audience:** Really?

**Staring:** Saleeby was promoting quitting smoking, promoting being exposed to the sun as health measures at that time. He was very influential. But now he's forgotten. There is no biography of him.

And he was the Medical Editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, which at the time, was the most popular newspaper in London, widely read. Shaw wrote in it. Other leading writers did. *The Times* was not the most influential paper then, the *Pall Mall Gazette* was. So, if you read a newspaper, you read the *Pall Mall Gazette*.

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38. In fact, the phrase negative eugenics was first coined by Saleeby. See Francis Galton (1909). *Essays in Eugenics*. Eugenics Education Society. London, p 100.

Alexander, having sent and get a letter to the editor published meant that he was trying to establish himself. That is also, why he gave out reprints of his letter to the *Pall Mall Gazette*. He gave them out as pamphlets to pupils.

**Staring:** Perhaps we should now have discussion:

**Audience:** On this research, are you putting it into a comprehensive biography?

**Staring:** Yes, I am planning with Ed Bouchard to bring out another edition with text and citations on a CD ROM.

**Audience:** When?

**Staring:** Maybe next year. I am planning to make a good story and make so that you can check the sources on an accompanying CD ROM at your own leisure.

**Audience:** You mean the book is difficult reading?

**Staring:** Oh, I don't mind that.

**Audience:** Is it as difficult as Alexander's writing?

**Staring:** No, more.

**Audience:** That's alright. I love Alexander's long sentences.

**Audience 10:** I want to be clear about what you are saying. Your research is marvelous. But I want to be clear. There is this myth of Alexander as Robinson Crusoe, but that is of course nonsense.

**Staring:** You are living here in New York.

**Audience:** Alexander probably took all kinds of things and synthesized a work that is his. Would you agree with that?

**Staring:** No.

**Audience 10:** Is there one person who has synthesized everything that Alexander had synthesized?

**Staring:** Yes, I understand.

**Audience3:** You meant synthesizing over the long term in 1920, 1930, 1940. All Staring has been talking about is the influences through 1910 or 1915. Is your question through 1915 or beyond that?

**Audience 10:** It could be 1915 or beyond that. What Jeroen has come up with so far are four or five major influences on Alexander's early work. What I am asking is, did Alexander find a way to incorporate these influences? It seems that no one else was doing that kind of work, meaning, those six influences and working with Alexander.

**Staring:** Another influence is Major Austin, a Major in the British Army. He worked with Alexander in 1906 and 1907. He also published this book, titled *Direct Paths to Health*, also on breathing, bringing together health influences. There were many of those teachers at that time. Because medicine at that time was a wasteland for treatment of diseases like tuberculosis. People went to the hospital and then died — or not. But there was no help. There was no help at trying to stop smoking. There was no relief for tuberculosis. When you know the history of the voice teacher Leo Kofler (the organist at St. Paul's in NYC), for instance, you see that he recommended his breathing method for relieving, even curing, tuberculosis. Why did he do that? He believed that he had cured himself of tuberculosis. Kofler had tuberculosis, probably in a very minimal, minor, form. He did breathing exercises, his health improved. He felt that that made his health improve. Alexander, also implied that his breathing method would cure tuberculosis.

There is one other person who invented the Alexander Technique before Alexander did. That is Dr. Scanes Spicer, who resigned from his hospital position as Consulting ENT surgeon at St. Mary's Hospital in London in 1908. At the same time, Alexander was drifting away from him and more toward the Saleeby camp. Scanes Spicer brought order and clarity into what was then a heated discussion in medical journals on breathing and posture. The then prevailing idea in medicine that breathing is dominant over posture came from the great anthropologist and anatomist Sir Arthur Keith. The discussion on posture was also brought forward by Arbuthnot Lane, another surgeon (and model for the knife-happy surgeon Sir Cutler Walpole in Shaw's play *The Doctor's Dilemma*). Lane focused on the role of posture and digestion. Keith and Lane had published numerous articles on breathing and posture in the British medical press, such as the *British Medi-*

*cal Journal* and *The Lancet*, by the way, frequently referring to various positions of “mechanical advantage.” Scanes Spicer argued against the constructs of Keith, in particular who had since 1903 postulated that optimal respiration will improve posture. Scanes Spicer turned Keith’s argument on its head, asserting first, that if you have good posture, as an effect of that, you will breath well. Scanes Spicer presented that theory in 1909.

Alexander was also working with that the idea that posture impacted breathing at the that same time. By then, Alexander was probably more under the influence of Saleeby. Certainly he had been influenced by Scanes Spicer. However, there is no doubt from the historical record that Scanes Spicer presented his findings to the public before Alexander did. Then we see, as an immediate reaction to Scanes Spicer’s articles, two pamphlets, in 1909 and 1910, by Alexander claiming that Scanes Spicer had stolen the idea from him.

This is also mallice in Jean Fischer’s notes in *Articles and Lectures*. Fischer says that when Alexander first came to England in June 1904, that Alexander, armed with letters of recommendation from Australian physicians such as Steward McKaye, sought out Scanes Spicer, who warmly received Alexander. Then, Fischer claims, Scanes Spicer was enthusiastic about Alexander. Not even a month later, according to Fischer, Scanes Spicer was presenting Alexander’s ideas as his own to the Annual General Meeting of the British Medical Association.<sup>39</sup>

**Audience:** I am not understanding what your point is. If you are saying that Alexander had numerous influences, that is fine. But if you are saying that Alexander used the exact same work, the complete work that someone else had developed, that is something else. I want to know which it is that you are asserting?

**Staring:** That is, of course, if you have all the data, then you can distinguish that. I cannot say at this moment. I only know what Alexander said and wrote from the texts that he wrote from 1910 and before. Examine Alexander’s articles up to 1908 in Fischer’s edition of *Articles and Lectures*, you can see that Alexander wrote on breathing. The technical terms that he then used like “position of mechanical advantage” are used in singing literature, in literature on Swedish massage, in literature on breathing.

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<sup>39</sup>.n page 293 of *A&E*. It on the point of the role of Scanes Spicer that Staring has the strongest differences with Fischer. .

These are technical terms taken from the breathing literature. The major sources are Leo Kofler, Oskar Guttmann, William Aikin, William Shakespeare, Major Reginald Austin. There are others, including Scanes Spicer. Of course, Alexander worked together with several of these men. For instance, compare Alexander's 1907 booklet and what Major Austin also wrote in the Spring of 1907 in the *Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps*. You almost see the same structure in the pamphlet of Alexander's and the scientific paper of Austin. They talk about Keith, Lane, two schools of breathing. From their texts one gets the impression that Austin and Alexander worked together but they phrased the information differently.

**Audience:** I think there is a confusion between theory and practice. The theories of two people can be almost identical. But what they do with those theories is what the difference is. The Alexander Technique is not primarily a theory. It is primarily a practice. It takes a long time to learn. So, I think that it is a mistake to make it appear as if Alexander is putting forward different parts of a theory. Instead, he is expressing his practice, borrowing theoretical terms.

There is an enormous difference. The theory is simple. The practice is difficult. All you have been addressing are the theoretical influences. The examples you give are of people doing similar things, examining words. You haven't examined what others were doing in practice. That's the real test of the technique. The theory is pretty irrelevant. I could have expressed a theory of the Alexander Technique fifteen years ago after I first read a few books about it. But I couldn't practice it. It takes years to learn. So, I think that's what I have been hearing all along is the confusion between theory and practice. The heart of the Alexander Technique is the practice not the theory.

**Staring:** Okay, let me answer. I agree with you that the practice is difficult to learn. Now, you have Scanes Spicer, in 1909 describing what we know today as the Alexander Technique.

**Audience:** No, he is describing theory. He is not describing a technique.

**Staring:** He is describing technique and theory. Have you read Scanes Spicer?

**Audience:** I have read the book.

**Staring:** What book? Scanes Spicer never wrote a book.

**Audience:** A long time ago, I read an article, demonstrating different types of breathing. There were photos of him showing belly breathing and back breathing. But, I read it ten years ago, and don't remember where. We had a guy [in our Alexander Technique teacher training class] who had researched a lot of that.

**Staring:** Yes that is one of his.<sup>40</sup>

**Audience:** Anyway, to evaluate whether someone was doing what Alexander did takes a long time. When you have a trained singer and an amateur, they might sing the same song. But a trained singer can tell whether someone is a [good singer] or not. It takes years to acquire. It takes years to acquire the ear to hear what a student is doing. Similarly it takes years to acquire the ability to teach the technique. Spicer spent a relatively short time, as far as I can tell, before he started [advancing] theories about [breathing].

**Staring:** Not true. Spicer began publishing articles on breathing in the 1880s and 1890s. He must have been busy. He was a physician. Between 1890 and 1909, he published at least 20 articles on breathing and posture. So he must have been busy.

**Audience:** To me it doesn't resemble the Alexander Technique:

**Staring:** Because you didn't read it.

**Audience:** I read a couple of articles.

**Staring:** That is not studying.

**Audience:** I will grant that I am not an expert on Spicer. But, to evaluate the Technique, you have to evaluate it much more as a practice than as a theory. That's my main contention. You have to look at the practice too.

**Staring:** But if you don't study the writings and practice of others beyond Alexander how do you know?

**Audience:** I studied the Technique.

**Staring:** You studied the Alexander Technique, you didn't study Scanes Spicer.

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40.The audience member showed Jeroen the photographs by Dr. Scanes Spicer in *A&E* opposing page 165.

**Audience 8:** Spicer made.

**Staring:** Scanes Spicer would not have been able to make a theoretical presentation of his technique if he had not practiced it.

**Audience:** There are many ways of practicing. You know, there is practicing in a repetitive way. There's practicing where you are constantly going beyond your habits. Most techniques that I hear about, are ways of practicing exercises or movements repetitively. But constantly re-examining ones habits is a never ending process. It's not even a technique.

**Staring:** I understand what you are saying. You should study Scanes Spicer, then you will change your view.

**Audience:** I don't even care though.

**Audience 10:** I was just reading Frank P. Jones' book. He says that it is unfortunate that it is called the Alexander Technique and not something generic. He spent all of his life trying to prove that it was something larger than the person. Would you disagree with the idea that the technique is something bigger than a single person. Or are you just still looking at the beginning of Alexander's career?

**Staring:** My view on the Alexander Technique is that it is something very valuable. I would call it the Scanes Spicer Technique. But you may call it the Alexander Technique.

**Audience 10:** So you won't call it the body-mind technique.

**Staring:** No not at all.

**Audience 10:** You believe that Alexander plagiarized from Scances Spicer.

**Staring:** Yes.

**Audience 10:** Okay

**Audience:** Actually it doesn't matter. All I care is that what we have is a good thing.

**Staring:** No, but it is good to see many influences. And if you have these influences from neurology like Frenkl, and from singing, then you can better understand what you

are teaching yourself. Why should the head go forward and up? You have this German book by Mensendieck in 1906, *Körperkultur der Frau*, there we have the drawings of the head going forward and up. Where is Alexander in 1906.? He was a breathing teacher whose texts indicate he had very little understanding of the function of the head on balance, voice, respiration, and breathing.

**Audience:** It's an influence.

**Staring:** But it is a good influence. It is trying to help people. Now I want to answer your questions.

**Audience 11:** You have pointed out five or six different influences on Alexander.

**Staring:** Yes, and people with whom he worked, studying, perhaps debating, adopting, changing.

**Audience 11:** Major influences.

**Staring:** They studied together. They tried out things together. I believe he worked with Major Austin. We know he worked with Scanes Spicer.

**Audience 11:** At one point he studied with Scanes Spicer and Austin. Earlier on he had studied with someone who taught him Delsarte. He studied with others. The cumulative effect of all of that produced where he was in 1908, doing a certain kind of work.

**Staring:** By 1908, he was still a breathing teacher.

**Audience:** Although, he did begin to bring in primary movement, which was the precursor to primary control.

**Staring:** Yes.

**Audience:** Fine, but where ever he was in 1908 was because of all of these influences. It seems to me there was no one else, at that point in history, doing what he was doing.

**Staring:** No. Scanes Spicer was doing that.

**Audience:** Not working in the same way. You have encouraged us to read more Scanes Spicer, which I will do. But it doesn't seem that Scanes Spicer had the same influences that Alexander did.

**Staring:** Scanes Spicer was a professional Ear Nose and Throat surgeon. He had the anatomical, physiological, etcetera, etcetera influences. He was the mentor of Alexander. The textual evidence strongly suggests that Alexander learned from him. Alexander did not teach Scanes Spicer. It was the other way around.

**Audience:** Mozart learned from someone too.

**Staring:** Yea, yea, yea, yea.<sup>41</sup>

**Bouchard:** That's a good point. What's missing? What we know as the core Alexander Technique observation about the role of balance on breathing was articulated first by Scanes Spicer and was, I believe, articulated more clearly and eloquently than Alexander did — in medical terms but nevertheless eloquently.

However, even at that time, Alexander had not yet developed the hands-on method of communicating his theory of use to a student. There is an interesting comment from Irene Tasker that all Alexander did in 1913 was to yell at his students. She said that the technique that people know today as the Alexander Technique was nothing like Alexander's later practice. Sometime after 1913, Alexander more and more began incorporating a hands-on practice, whether acquired from Scanes Spicer or somewhere else. Overtime, he transformed the method that he taught from the breathing technique that he had articulated at least until 1908, to the indirect method of controlling breathing by assisting a student to discover a balanced use that facilitates optimal respiration.

But the sophisticated hands-on work that Alexander ultimately developed, whether from other sources or on his own is not Alexander's main contribution. The great contribution that Alexander made was to not only learn to teach students himself but to develop a reproducible way to train teachers to pass that skill on to others.

**Staring:** Yes.

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41. Staring also notes the work of a German physician whom, he says, “almost strode the same way as Scanes Spicer did, but did not know of Scanes Spicer. He is called Johannes Faust, and wrote a book on his technique: *Aktive Entspannungsbehandlung*. Another person who ‘discovered’ almost the same as Scanes Spicer did was German violin teacher Siegfried Eberhardt. Every AT teacher should read his *Der Körper in Form und in Hemmung: Die Beherrschung der Disposition als Lebensgrundlage*.”

**Bouchard:** That is where we need to look. I agree with Jones that the technique has to be characterized as something bigger than just the work of Alexander. Jeroen helps with research to discover the connections to how the technique developed. Next, we have to examine what is happening in a lesson. How does the transmission between teacher and student take place? What is going on? What is this communication about? When a Alexander Technique teacher puts their hands on some-one and there is a change, what is happening? Danny said that it is a non-quantifiable personal technique. It will remain non-quantifiable if that is what we believe. But this work is a method, a science to which many have made contributions. If the science is to grow, we have to be open to more people making contributions in the future.

**Staring:** In fact if you go back in history you will see.

**Bouchard:** The audience is getting restless. We have been here for two hours. Perhaps we should stop.