

# Notes on Penelope Easten's *The Alexander Technique – Twelve Fundamentals of Integrated Movement*

## – A review of a revised history of the Alexander Technique

Easten's book<sup>1</sup> postulates the existence of an "original" Alexander Technique, arguing that Alexander prior to 1915 taught a different technique, which he kept a secret later on and which became "lost" to modern mainstream Alexander Technique teachers. The existence of this "initial" technique is predicated on a large number of unsubstantiated claims, some of which are examined below, and hence this paper only examines Easten's revised history of the Alexander Technique (AT), not her interpretations of the Technique itself.

The page numbers given in the main text refer to Easten's book. This paper is based on the first edition of Easten's book. All other references are given in the footnotes. I have used abbreviations for Alexander's books.<sup>2</sup>

### Contents

1. The claims that Alexander changed his technique several times
2. The alleged changes to the Technique in 1914
3. The claims that Alexander rewrote his books
4. The claim that teachers were "angry" with Alexander's "change" of technique
5. The claim that Alexander falsified his account of his development of his technique
6. The claim that Alexander created a "self-made man" myth
7. The claim that Alexander covered up that his grandparents were transported to Australia as convicts
8. The claim that Alexander and his family were co-conspirators
9. Was Alexander a liar?
10. The alleged influence of Delsarte
11. The claim that the Alexander Technique is not a self-help method
12. The appropriation of Margaret Goldie
13. Conclusion

I. THE CLAIMS THAT ALEXANDER CHANGED HIS TECHNIQUE SEVERAL TIMES  
 Easten claims that Alexander changed his teaching method several times (pp. xiii, 8), based on what Alexander wrote in his books. “Before he started the first training course in 1931, he changed his teaching several times – around 1912, again in the early 1920s, and then in 1925.” (p. 8)

There is no reference for these postulates,<sup>3</sup> but a couple of arguments may be inferred. Of course, the 1925 date might refer to Alexander coining the term “primary control”, but such appellation does not in itself mean a new technique. There are several references to the importance of the the head–neck–back relationship before the term “primary control”.<sup>4</sup> He had discovered a more appropriate phrasing for something he was already teaching.

It is contrived to assume that a new wording is proof of a new method. For example, Alexander used the phrasing “relax” the neck<sup>5</sup> and later “free” the neck and later advised not to mention the neck,<sup>6</sup> but no teacher (that I know of) has suggested or is suggesting that this signifies a change of technique. The fundamentals have not changed. Easten acknowledges that Alexander continued to develop his technique throughout his life (she postulates five stages, pp. 127–130), but she does not consider his mature experiences of any significance, and is instead searching for some primordial technique which, however, is not supported by any of Alexander’s early writings.

In support of her argument that in “twenty-two years [between 1910 and 1932], the head/neck balance has gone from being the last to get involved to apparently being the leader” (p. 277), Easten quotes a sentence she attributes to the 1910 edition of *MSI*.<sup>7</sup> However, this sentence does not appear in 1910, but in the 1918 and subsequent editions of *MSI*.

However, the 1910 *MSI* does state: “The desire to stiffen the neck muscles should be inhibited as a preliminary”.<sup>8</sup> And: “The teacher, having decided upon the orders necessary for securing the elongation of the spine, the freedom of the neck (i.e. requisite natural laxness) and other conditions desirable to the particular case in hand, . . .”<sup>9</sup> And in the *MSI Addenda* (1911), Alexander writes that, after having studied the means and not the end, and prepared the correct position, then:

. . . order the neck to relax, and at the same time order the head forward and up.<sup>10</sup>

How are these descriptions not indicating that the head–neck–back (neck–spine) relationship is primary?

Alexander was always keen to communicate principles, not specifics, and the principles did not change (if they did, nobody has given a reference for it). Alexander changed his wording and used different examples of pupils and of teaching in his books to illustrate the principles. A change of wording does not necessarily signify a change of method. Alexander developed his vocabulary over years in his ongoing attempts to find the most appropriate words which would convey his meaning.

## 2. THE ALLEGED CHANGES TO THE TECHNIQUE IN 1914

Easten claims that hands-on work really only started in 1914, the subtitle to this discussion being “Stage 3: 1914–25. Hands-on work begins.” (p. 128). She writes:

“Alexander’s discovery circa 1914 was that he could use his hands to bring about profound postural changes in his pupil without verbal communication.” (p. 333).

This contradicts all available evidence.

In *CCC*, in the chapter “Illustration”, Alexander very clearly states what orders the teacher needs to communicate to the pupil for the purpose of the pupil giving him- or herself these orders. See also the chapter “The Stutterer” in *UoS*<sup>11</sup> (referred to in more detail below).

Easten also writes:

“About 1914, Alexander realized that his hands conveyed his own use to the pupil. Now the focus changed: pupils recited their orders while he gave them the new sensory experiences that they could then bring about for themselves at home.” (p. 128).

This is an inventive interpretation of a remark Jones made in *Freedom to Change*, where he wrote, “FM told me that in 1914 he was just beginning to find a new way of using his hands in teaching. By applying the inhibitory control (which had proved so effective in breathing and speaking) to the use of his hands he was learning to make changes in a pupil that were different from ordinary manipulation or postural adjustment”. This says nothing about whether or not the pupils were reciting their orders, or whether this could be done without verbal communication. The inclusion of “new” in “a new way” indicates that Alexander had already been using hands-on work before. Easten is reading her own agenda into Jones’ writings.<sup>12</sup>

On Easten's website she is more blunt as to her claim that hands-on work was a late development: "For the first twenty years of his work, he worked by verbal directions alone."<sup>13</sup>

Alexander had clearly used hands-on before 1914. He refers to it in 1908.<sup>14 15</sup>

Alexander several times describes in his books what the teacher needs to communicate (verbally) to his or her pupil. In his 1912 *CC* he stated not only that he used hands in teaching, but that he could teach others to use their hands for the purpose of his technique:

"(3) I am able to manipulate, and to teach others to manipulate the human machine with the hands; and with an open-minded pupil it is possible to remove many defects in a few minutes, for example, to change entirely the production of a voice, its quality and power."<sup>16</sup>

We know that Alexander had taught his brother (A.R.), his sister (Amy), his friend Robert Young, and one of his students (Lilian Twycross) to teach his work in Australia.<sup>17</sup> Of course, people may argue they were not taught to use hands-on work, but why would Alexander write that he could teach others to use hands-on work unless he had already done so?

Both Marjory Barlow and Walter Carrington said that Alexander used hands-on work already in Australia.<sup>18, 19</sup> Both Barlow and Carrington were clear that the hands are there to give meaning to the words.<sup>20</sup>

### 3. THE CLAIMS THAT ALEXANDER REWROTE HIS BOOKS

In order to support the supposition that Alexander fundamentally changed his teaching method, Easten makes at least two claims:

"He rewrote *MSI* (1918) emphasizing that you need a teacher – you cannot do it for yourself." (p. 128).

[Easten seems not quite sure about this since she also writes that in *MSI* the pupil "is doing the brainwork to bring about change for themselves." (p. 128).]

"The emphasis of the work now [around 1918?] shifted to being purely educational, and "clients" were now "pupils". (p. 128).

This again contradicts available evidence. Alexander in his 1910 *MSI*, 1911 *MSI Addenda*, and 1912 *CC*, refers to "pupils", not "clients".<sup>21, 22</sup> If

Easten has evidence to the contrary she is not giving the reference.

It is true that Alexander in his 1910 *MSI*, 1911 *MSI Addenda*, and 1912 *CC* did not “emphasize” the need of a teacher, but neither did any of these publications state or indicate that the reader could do it for himself.

“He later rewrote *MSI* once again (1946) and also *CCC* (1955) to include the new concepts.” (p. 129).

This is a peculiar statement; again it is not clear what is meant by the “new concepts”. Possibly the term “primary control”, which is mentioned once in the new introduction to the 1946 edition of *MSI*. A new introduction hardly qualifies as a rewrite. Again, references are needed to support this claim.

As for *CCC*, Easten refers to a 1955 edition, but Easten’s bibliography does not contain a 1955 edition. She may be referring to the 1987 Gollancz edition which states that the preface to the new edition is from the 1955 edition. However, the 1955 *CCC* edition is merely a reprint of the 1946 edition in which the preface to the new edition first appeared. The new preface mentions *The Use of the Self* and the concepts of “the known” and “the unknown” which first appeared in *UoS*. This does not constitute a rewrite.

As for the 1946 *CCC* itself a few, minor changes were made between the 1923 (first) and the 1946 edition, and they are all listed on p. xxxix of the 2004 edition.<sup>23</sup> The changes are mainly grammatical with small changes in the style of writing. Certainly none of these changes alter the meaning.

Easten is not concerned with actual changes to the *MSI* editions, which have been listed in the 1996 edition. Nor is she concerned with a fundamental change of the definition of “primary control” between the first edition (1931) and later (1946) editions of *UoS*. These are real changes, already documented, but somehow these do not fit with Easten’s narrative and so are ignored.

Easten clearly wishes to indicate that Alexander deliberately suppressed earlier material, and she implies that the technique presented in *UoS* (1931) became the modern AT and “the rest was forgotten”. Alexander, however, was keen that all his books remained in print so that there was a record available of the evolution of his thinking, and the 1918 *MSI* (incorporating a 1907 article), *CCC*, *UoS*, and *UCL* remained in print all his life. Alexander was also keen that people read his books.<sup>24</sup>

#### 4. THE CLAIM THAT TEACHERS WERE “ANGRY” WITH ALEXANDER’S “CHANGE” OF TECHNIQUE

“This coincided with the first training course and became the modern AT; the rest was forgotten, and Goldie, Whittaker, and others were angry at this.” (p. 129).

This is a complete surprise to all historians of the Alexander Technique as this version of events has not been suggested before. No source is provided for this statement, and so the reader is left in the dark. Who exactly was “angry” and what are the sources for them being “angry”?

Easten goes on to quote John Skinner, but Skinner was *not* on the first training course; he only started training in 1946. How is that an argument for changes taking place with the first training course in 1931? – and for people being “angry” with this?

#### 5. THE CLAIM THAT ALEXANDER FALSIFIED HIS ACCOUNT OF HIS DEVELOPMENT OF HIS TECHNIQUE

I have addressed this accusation elsewhere and do not wish to repeat the rebuttal here.<sup>25</sup>

However, as an illustration of Easten’s selective quoting, it is worth examining. For example, Easten writes that Alexander claimed “he sorted these problems [voice problems] unaided, as if the colonies were a cultural desert” (p. 127), and cites five authors which purport to show what “a wealth of ideas was available alongside Delsarte work”. Despite the fact that we know more about the voice and elocution teachers Alexander had read, or might have read, we also know that none of this material contains the principles of Alexander’s technique, and certainly none of this material refers to inhibition and direction and the importance of the head–neck–back relationship.

Easten also writes that “John Skinner said that *UoS* is ‘a terrible book, falsifying what happened’” (p. 129).

The source for this information is a document – “Edward Owen Interview Notes 1961–62” – which I published as a PDF.<sup>26</sup> I specifically made it clear in my introduction (page 1) that “these were interview notes, originally done in shorthand, and later typed out. As the biography project was aborted these notes were not shared and consequently the interviewees did not have the opportunity to read these notes and make corrections. Note that some people’s recollections are at variance with other sources.”

In other words, we cannot be sure that John Skinner is quoted correctly, nor can we be sure what exactly he is referring to. Not only is this piece of evidence – highlighted as unreliable in the source she quotes – selected by Easten, but evidence to the contrary is ignored.

This is not befitting behaviour of someone impartially seeking to uncover the truth. A historian would naturally weigh a number of sources and evidences before reaching a conclusion.

Easten does not acknowledge the existence of alternative evidence such as – everybody else! No one, in Alexander's family (Barlow, Evans), of the teachers he trained (Tasker, Westfeldt, Barstow, Whittaker, Barlow, Carrington, Macdonald), of his distinguished pupils (Dewey, and many others) doubted or ever had reason to doubt the story presented by Alexander in "Evolution of a Technique" in *UoS*.<sup>27</sup> In the South African libel case (1948)<sup>28</sup> the people who attacked Alexander for a wide variety of reasons never brought up the issue as to whether Alexander lied in *UoS*. John Skinner only started training as a teacher with Alexander in 1946, and later became a secretary at Ashley Place. It is not obvious why Skinner should have some special insight into Alexander and his history which would have escaped everybody else.<sup>29</sup>

As I met and spoke with Edward Owen about these interviews, it is disquieting to see John Skinner being so selectively quoted without any qualification.

#### 6. THE CLAIM THAT ALEXANDER CREATED A "SELF-MADE MAN" MYTH

Easten is fundamentally claiming that Alexander's success is all due to a lie:

"Alexander prospered with his 'self-made man' myth. How else would such an uneducated man from the colonies have made such a splash in Edwardian England?" (p. 129, see also p. 128.)

Easten also writes that Australia "was not a cultural backwater" (p. 127), but she suggests that if you are from the colonies, you could not possibly succeed in Edwardian England unless you created a "self-made man" myth.

Any historian will be astounded at the implied assumption that you could not succeed in Edwardian or any other times unless you lied and created a "self-made man" myth. People from a wide variety of poor backgrounds (and "uneducated") have risen to fame and fortune throughout human history, in all countries and all civilisations, from the

dawn of time, and continue to do so to this day, without creating a “self-made man” myth or having to prevaricate about their past. Examples are numerous.<sup>30</sup>

It is up to the reader to decide whether Alexander made “a splash” or not, but he never achieved riches and fame. He achieved a comfortable middle-class life, nothing more.

#### 7. THE CLAIM THAT ALEXANDER COVERED UP THAT HIS GRANDPARENTS WERE TRANSPORTED TO AUSTRALIA AS CONVICTS

Easten writes, “He [Alexander] covered up his family convict background, . . .” (p. 129)

No reference or evidence is given for this.

For the record: Alexander’s grandfather and his brother took part in the “Swing Riots” of the 1830s, protesting against the hardship brought about by the declining conditions for farm labourers; the introduction of new agricultural machinery meant fewer workers were needed. Matthias and Joseph Alexander took part in destroying some threshing machines in November 1830.<sup>31</sup> Today this would be called a violent demonstration or political activism, but Easten does not mention the actual details because she wants to build up a picture of a criminal family. (In 1831 Matthias and Joseph Alexander were sentenced to “transportation” for seven years and were sent to Tasmania, but received an amnesty as part of a general amnesty of all such rioters. They chose however to stay in Tasmania.) Or is Easten referring to Alexander’s grandmother, Mary Redden, an Irish Catholic, who had been transported in 1832, aged sixteen, for stealing a dress worth five shillings?<sup>32</sup> Or the grandmother on Alexander’s mother’s side who was convicted at aged sixteen of receiving stolen silver?<sup>33</sup> These are the crimes of Alexander’s grandparents which “he covered up”. (Actually, we have no evidence that he covered it up. Perhaps he did go around and tell everybody all the time. We don’t know. Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.)

When Easten writes “family” she can only mean the grandparents: there are no reports of his parents having been in trouble with the law. The F. M. Alexander biographer, Michael Bloch, suggests that Alexander’s grandfather, like other people of their time, did not tell his children of their past. Matthias Alexander, the grandfather, died before Alexander was born. In other words, Alexander may not have even known that his grandparents were convicts.

In a private letter, late in his life (1940), Alexander describes himself as a “half-Scot”.<sup>34</sup> As Alexander’s grandparents on his father’s side were from

Wiltshire and his grandmother on his mother's side was from London (it is not certain where the grandfather was from but possibly also London), it may indicate that Alexander was misinformed as to his family origins. It seems unlikely he should have invented a new ancestry for himself as there would be nothing to gain from such a deceit.

Alexander did not hide he came from Australia.<sup>35</sup> That fact alone would have revealed to people in London that he was likely to have had at least one convict ancestor.

#### 8. THE CLAIM THAT ALEXANDER AND HIS FAMILY WERE CO-CONSPIRATORS

In order to support the view that Alexander covered up his "family convict background, the sources he had studied, and the progressive stages of his work" (p. 129) despite lack of evidence, Easten impugns not only Alexander but his entire family:

"His family must have been loyal co-conspirators all the way through."  
(p. 129).

To bolster the argument that the whole family was in on a deception, Easten writes, "Today we see family secrets as shameful, but the Victorians saw them as the glue that bonded a family (research cited in *Stephen Fry's Victorian Secrets*, [www.audible.co.uk](http://www.audible.co.uk))."<sup>36</sup> (p. 129).

The only "research" cited in Stephen Fry's audio book is a book, *Family Secrets: The Things We Tried to Hide* by Deborah Cohen.<sup>36</sup> Cohen, a historian, cites various examples of secrets kept by families in the period 1780s–1970s, but these examples all refer to avoiding social embarrassment and shame: they include hiding or covering up affairs, illegitimate children,<sup>37</sup> instances of homosexuality, of insanity, or of bankruptcy in the family. These are secrets kept to avoid disgrace and social exclusion. None of the examples given in Cohen's book pertain to what Easten is suggesting: a deceit for the purpose of making money. Cohen's book also suggests that lies might alternatively put strain and stress on families, not universally securing bonding, and provides examples of family members who did not keep secrets.<sup>38</sup> Cohen gives examples which illustrate the changing social mores between the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries as to what constitutes acceptable behaviour, as to what is "private" and as to what custom suggests should be public knowledge.

#### 9. WAS ALEXANDER A LIAR?

Having cast a lot of aspersions on Alexander, Easten writes about Alex-

ander's development of his technique as described in *UoS* that "we now know it was not the path he took" (for this issue see point 5.), but "This is not to call him a liar" (p. 129).

Such a statement sits uneasily with the above points about Alexander having "falsified" his development of his technique, that his "self-made" man story was a myth (and therefore not true), and that the whole family were "co-conspirators" in these deceptions. It is very difficult to avoid the conclusion that Easten is portraying Alexander as a liar.

#### 10. THE ALLEGED INFLUENCE OF DELSARTE

There have been insinuations by Jeando Masoero that Alexander derived his technique predominantly from Delsarte's method.<sup>39</sup> No firm evidence has been provided in support of this supposition. Easten refers to Masoero many times, for example:

"...he [Jeando] has hypothesized some origins of the technique." (p. 125).

"Whether or not this is exactly what Alexander was doing, Masoero has given us a missing link." (p. 126).

"Hidden in Delsarte's writings, Masoero has found many elements of Alexander technique" (p. 126).

However, as Masoero does not feature in the references (perhaps there are no written evidence or arguments?<sup>40</sup>), it is not possible to investigate Masoero's claims, and we must therefore rely solely on the information provided by Easten.

Easten claims that "Alexander was hugely influenced by the Delsarte system" (p. 9), but fails to support this claim by any sources. That Alexander knew of Delsarte has been known for years.<sup>41</sup> Alexander mentions the "Delsarte system" in a letterhead (about 1900),<sup>42</sup> in his prospectus for his Sydney Dramatic and Operatic Conservatorium,<sup>43</sup> and sometimes (not often) in advertisements in connection with the Conservatorium.<sup>44</sup> Alexander did not mention it later (except acknowledging his knowledge of the Delsarte method for acting<sup>45, 46</sup>) probably because it was of no significance as far as his technique was concerned.

Easten writes, "In 1918, Alexander told the philosopher Horace Kallen that William James and Delsarte were sources of his technique." (p. 128). This is not true: Kallen only refers to James in the 1958 conversations on Dewey (in which he is speaking from memory) regarding his 1918

meeting with Alexander.<sup>47</sup> Easten's source, Alex Murray,<sup>48</sup> is mistaken. To show that Alexander was influenced by Delsarte, Easten writes:

"Delsarte's central ideas include the concept of faulty sensory perception, the law of opposition and the law of extension. He saw the body as only an instrument of the mind. Only lengthening can be trusted, and this is brought about by constructive conscious control. To bring about change you were to understand and memorize directions, and work industriously in front of two-way mirrors with strong physical work brought about with thinking, until you saw the desired results." (p. 126).

There is no evidence – to the best of my knowledge – that Delsarte used mirrors extensively and that it involved "strong physical work". I am unable to find such information in Franck Waille's biography and description of Delsarte's method.<sup>49</sup> <sup>50</sup> I would be grateful to have actual references for this proposition.

At the same time – hedging her bets – Easten admits, "However, we do not know Delsarte's actual methods that Alexander might have learned" (p. 126), and, "We do not know Delsarte's precise method to achieve this balance [alignment of the bones with gravity]" (p. 130). Yet she implies that Masoero has discovered what Alexander "must have" taught originally, based on supposed similarities between Delsarte and Alexander, and that several important concepts of the Alexander Technique, such as "faulty sensory appreciation" and "constructive conscious control", originated from Delsarte's teaching (p. 126). References are again lacking for these claims.

As an argument for Alexander having been inspired by Delsarte's method to use mirrors Easten refers to a 1885 book by Stebbins' book, *Delsarte System of Expression*<sup>51</sup>: "It [Stebbins' book] instructs the reader to spend long hours in front of mirrors, which we know Alexander did, so some have assumed this is what he read." (p. 125). But we don't know. Alexander turned to the mirror for a solution to his loss of voice.

Stebbins' book is a list of exercises and "laws" in order to learn the Delsarte system of expression.<sup>52</sup> Stebbins advises the reader to use a mirror: "I wish you to buy a mirror large enough to reflect your entire figure, and faithfully to practice many hours a day if you wish rapid results."<sup>53</sup> There is nothing about self-observation or about the influence of the head-neck-back relationship on the whole. It is very difficult to find anything in the book which has any bearing or relevance to the Alexander Technique. And we don't know if Alexander read Stebbins.<sup>54</sup>

Why would Alexander as an actor have to be prompted to use a mirror? Actors use mirrors all the time; for their make-up, for checking their dress, perhaps for checking how certain facial expressions and gestures look. The use of a mirror comes naturally to a performer for observing yourself.

If Alexander was so influenced by Delsarte why did he not refer to Delsarte already in 1894? Why did he only refer to Delsarte in about 1900–01 in the context of training actors? And never before or since in his writings?

Easten writes that “Masero has also uncovered that Delsarte had trained his brother Camille (1817–77) who then emigrated to Tasmania and Australia in 1851. He presumably taught many of the stage community of the day with whom Alexander would then mingle and learn, possibly including Edith – Alexander’s future wife.” (p. 126). There is no source for the suggestion that Delsarte had trained his brother Camille. In Australia Camille advertised himself as a “Professor of Singing and Teacher of the Piano”. Graeme Skinner has collected newspaper references to Camille in Australia.<sup>55</sup> They relate mainly to Camille’s performances as a singer and composer. There are only a couple of references indicating that Camille also taught singing and piano (and in one case, acting as it applies to the singer). There is no mention of the Delsarte system. References please?

As Edith Page was born 1865 and Camille died in 1877, she would have to have had lessons at a very early age in order to have been taught by Camille. The link to Alexander is tenuous.

Easten and/or Masero are attributing so many aspects of the Alexander Technique to Delsarte that it amounts to insinuating that Delsarte is the progenitor of the Technique. Given the many books now in existence on Delsarte and his system, if there are any direct connections to Delsarte why are these not quoted and referenced?<sup>56, 57</sup>

## II. THE CLAIM THAT THE ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE IS NOT A SELF-HELP METHOD

“If Masero is correct, the Alexander technique really did start as a self-help method, but quickly became a method of teachers working on pupils. This original material was perhaps even suppressed by Alexander, as it was gone by 1915 or earlier, once he discovered he could communicate the work through his hands.” (p. 9).

Easten later contradicts this by writing, “About 1914, Alexander realized that his hands conveyed his own use to the pupil. Now the focus

changed: pupils recited their orders while he gave them the new sensory experiences that they could then bring about for themselves at home.” (p. 128). So, if the purpose of Alexander's teaching is that the pupil can bring it about themselves, how is this not a self-help method?

Alexander wrote a number of articles and letters on his technique between 1895 and 1910 which have been available in various forms,<sup>58</sup> and the known collection of papers was published in 1995.<sup>59</sup> There is no evidence that this material was “suppressed by Alexander” or that there is other material which has been suppressed.

There is no evidence that Alexander did not always consider his technique a self-help method. The Alexander Technique has – unlike a treatment – always been a self-help method in that the teacher, through examples such as an everyday activity, demonstrates how to apply the principles of the Technique, so that the pupil learns how to put these principles into practice, and so can apply these principles to his or her own life. Alexander made it very clear that his technique was an education (or re-education), and not a cure; that it required active conscious participation; that it was a learning process for the purpose of the pupil gaining independence from the teacher.<sup>60</sup>

An example of how Alexander taught, what he told his pupils, how he dealt with a specific difficulty, and how he engaged them in the process of learning is given in the chapter “The Stutterer” in *UoS* (first published in 1931).<sup>61</sup> It is a good example of how the Alexander Technique helps pupils to help themselves, and it emphasizes that the active participation of the pupil is required throughout: it is not done by hands-on work alone.

## 12. THE APPROPRIATION OF MARGARET GOLDIE

Easten repeatedly refers to Goldie and was obviously influenced by her teaching. For the purpose of attributing Goldie with special insights into the Alexander Technique, Easten elevates her status. There are various misleading phrasings to indicate that Goldie somehow knew more than other teachers. For example, Easten writes, “Goldie predated the training course” (p. 9), that is, had lessons before the start of the course, and thereby implying that therefore she had a special insight. However, all the first training course students had lessons before the first training course started and so they all “predated” the training course. Irene Tasker “predated” the first training course by some 18 or 19 years, and she never referred to any fundamental changes in Alexander's teaching or approach. She wrote and lectured on the Technique.<sup>62</sup> Because Goldie wrote so little and only very generally on the Technique, we know very little about

Goldie's views.<sup>63</sup>

I had lessons with Margaret Goldie (five lessons in 1988), and unlike Easten who experienced Goldie applying "strong pulls" (p. 126), I did not experience any "pulls", "strong" or otherwise. Fiona Robb's book of her lessons with Margaret Goldie also gives a different impression from Easten's interpretation of Goldie's teaching,<sup>64</sup> as does Ted MacNamara<sup>65</sup> (a teacher who also wrote of experiences of his lessons with Margaret Goldie). Easten appears to be appropriating Goldie's style of teaching, based solely on her own individual lessons. Teachers already know how different interpretations teachers may make of the teacher training course where they trained – and that is after spending five days a week for three years with a teacher – and so to generalise so liberally from individual lessons is a rash undertaking.

### 13. CONCLUSION

Given the many inconsistencies, contradictions and suppositions, the overall impression of Alexander's development of his technique presented in Easten's book is confusing. However, for a reader who is new to the Alexander Technique, Alexander comes across as unreliable and a knave.

Easten presents Alexander as dishonest. She writes that he did not develop the Technique as he said he did and as he described in *UoS* and *UCL*, but instead invented or borrowed from other sources, turning Alexander's story of the development of his technique into an unreliable pastiche of plagiarism and fancy. By portraying Alexander as a sly character, keeping the "real" or "original" Alexander Technique to himself, Easten–Masoero can then claim to have uncovered and revealed for the first time this "initial" technique.

Only arguments which undermine Alexander's story are considered and given an airing, the net effect being to besmirch Alexander's character and that of his family, and to question the validity of what Easten calls "mainstream" Alexander Technique. The implication is also that modern mainstream Alexander Technique is not a self-help technique but based on a development (hands-on work) by Alexander which was only done for financial gain.

To reach this conclusion Easten's book contains a pile of conjectures. Apart from those mentioned above, Easten at times suggests that Alexander "must have" this or that when she cannot cite any evidence. Given all the "must have" (three times on p. 129, then p. 135, and p. 141) and the unsubstantiated claims (referred to above) in Easten's story, it requires less credulity to believe that Alexander, his family, his pupils, and

the teachers of his training course were truthful.

There is a key question with Easten's book: the Easten–Masoero method presented in the book is based on the premise that it includes Alexander's secret technique and therefore, if this premise is false, the whole Easten-Masoero method is a fantasy, based on a large amount of conjectural interpretations. Why rest the entire method on such a speculative foundation? If Easten-Masoero have discovered an alternative version of the Alexander Technique which they like, why not just present it and let people find out for themselves to what extent it works? Why create what amounts to a conspiracy theory in order to promote a new method?

I would recommend the author to re-examine her sources and consider other sources in order to be able to present a more accurate history of Alexander and of the Alexander Technique, and to incorporate a more balanced view in any future editions of her book.

*Jean M. O. Fischer*  
Graz, November 2021

## Endnotes

- 1 *The Alexander Technique – Twelve Fundamentals of Integrated Movement* by Penelope Easten (Handspring Publishing, 2021).
- 2 MSI: *Man's Supreme Inheritance*. CC: *Conscious Control*. CCC: *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual*. UoS: *The Use of the Self*. UCL: *The Universal Constant in Living*. The year of the MSI edition referred to is given in parenthesis.
- 3 A possible source is Jeroen Staring who has also speculated on changes in Alexander's way of teaching between 1911 and 1931. See *Frederick Matthias Alexander 1869–1955 – The Origins and History of the Alexander Technique* by Jeroen Staring (Integral, 2005), pp. 260, 261.
- 4 See for example *Man's Supreme Inheritance* by F. Matthias Alexander (Mouritz, 1996), pp. 173, 174.
- 5 *Man's Supreme Inheritance* by F. Matthias Alexander (Mouritz, 1996), p. 173.
- 6 *A Time to Remember* by Walter H. M. Carrington (The Sheildrake Press, 1996), 4 November 1946 entry, p. 58.
- 7 She quotes *Man's Supreme Inheritance* by F. Matthias Alexander (Mouritz, 2011), p. 172, which is almost identical to the Mouritz 1996 edition, which is based on the 1946 edition.
- 8 *Man's Supreme Inheritance (1910), Man's Supreme Inheritance Addenda (1911), Conscious Control (1912) – Facsimile of First Editions of Books on the F. M. Alexander Technique* by F. Matthias Alexander (Mouritz, 2021), p. 97.
- 9 *Man's Supreme Inheritance (1910), Man's Supreme Inheritance Addenda (1911), Conscious Control (1912) – Facsimile of First Editions of Books on the F. M. Alexander Technique* by F. Matthias Alexander (Mouritz, 2021), p. 209.

- 10 *Man's Supreme Inheritance (1910), Man's Supreme Inheritance Addenda (1911), Conscious Control (1912) – Facsimile of First Editions of Books on the F. M. Alexander Technique* by F. Matthias Alexander (Mouritz, 2021), p. 241. See also p. 242.
- 11 *The Use of the Self* by F. Matthias Alexander (Methuen, 1939), pp. 69–88.
- 12 As Easten uses online teaching and teaches teachers in online teaching, it could be argued that it is in her interests to belittle hands-on work. See for example: <https://penelope-s-school-4df3.thinkific.com/courses/training-to-teach-online-for-AT-teachers>. Retrieved 26 November 2021.
- 13 <https://alexandertechniqueinfo.org/online-alexander-technique-lessons>. Retrieved 26 November 2021.
- 14 “Re-Education of the Kinæsthetic Systems” (1908) in *Articles and Lectures* by F. M. Alexander (Mouritz, 1995, London), pp. 82–83.
- 15 See also <https://mouritz.org/companion/article/hands-work>. Available for all to read since 2018.
- 16 *Man's Supreme Inheritance (1910), Man's Supreme Inheritance Addenda (1911), Conscious Control (1912) – Facsimile of First Editions of Books on the F. M. Alexander Technique* by F. Matthias Alexander (Mouritz, 2021), p. 291.
- 17 *Frederick Matthias Alexander – A Family History* by Jackie Evans (Phillimore & Co., 2001), pp. 135, 137.
- 18 *An Examined Life* by Marjory Barlow, Trevor Allen Davies (Mornum Time Press, 2002), p. 65.
- 19 *Personally Speaking* by Walter Carrington, Seán Carey (Mouritz, 2001 [1986]), pp. 12–13.
- 20 See for example *An Examined Life* by Marjory Barlow, Trevor Allen Davies (Mornum Time Press, 2002), p. 212.
- 21 *Man's Supreme Inheritance (1910), Man's Supreme Inheritance Addenda (1911), Conscious Control (1912) – Facsimile of First Editions of Books on the F. M. Alexander Technique* by F. Matthias Alexander (Mouritz, 2021).
- 22 See also the many references to pupils in his early (pre-1910 papers) in *Articles and Lectures* by F. Matthias Alexander, edited by Jean M. O. Fischer (Mouritz, 1995).
- 23 *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual* by F. Matthias Alexander, (Mouritz, 2004).
- 24 *Explaining the Alexander Technique* by Walter Carrington, Seán Carey, (Mouritz, 2004), pp. 8–9.
- 25 “Some thoughts on F. M. Alexander’s story of the evolution of the Technique” by Jean M. O. Fischer in *AmSAT Journal* no. 17 (AmSAT, Fall 2020), pp. 19–27.
- 26 “Edward Owen Interview Notes 1961–62” PDF. <https://mouritz.org/library/articles/index>.
- 27 Alexander’s record of his development of his technique was written down at least twenty years later (according to Irene Tasker he started *UoS* in the early 1920s – see “Connecting Links” in *Irene Tasker – Her Life and Work with the Alexander Technique* by Regina Stratil (Mouritz, 2020)), and of course was written down with the benefit of hindsight; he uses a vocabulary (such as

- inhibition, direction, primary control) which was not available to him at the time of his discoveries. No one disputes that his record was from memory and not a day-by-day account. (See for example, *Explaining the Alexander Technique* by Walter Carrington, Seán Carey, Mouritz, 2004, pp. 115-16.) However, the accuracy of the fundamental stages that he went through has not been questioned until recently (e.g. see note 29).
- 28 *South African Libel Case 1948 Vols. 1-4* edited by Jean M. O. Fischer (Mouritz, 2021).
- 29 Michael Bloch, in his biography of Alexander, also casts doubts on the accuracy of Alexander's account, but Bloch can only quote Skinner as a source for such doubt. See pp. 35-36, pp. 145-46 in *F. M. the Life of Frederick Matthias Alexander* by Michael Bloch (Little Brown, 2004).
- 30 From around Alexander's time one could mention Charlie Chaplin, who rose from East End London poverty and hardship to Hollywood actor and director. Or Max Aitken, 1st Baron Beaverbrook, one of ten children of a farmer in Canada, who became a newspaper baron, owner of the *Daily Express* (at one time the most successful mass-circulation newspaper in the world), and became a minister under Winston Churchill. Or the 7th Prime Minister of Australia (1915-23), Billy Hughes, the son of a Welsh carpenter, who worked many odd-jobs, first in England, then in Australia, before entering politics. Or Eugen Sandow, who rose from being a travelling circus athlete to developing his own body-building system, writing several books, and having a famous gym in London at the time of Alexander. Or Sir Thomas Huxley, who was the son of a poor school teacher in Ealing. Or Sir Henry Irving, who was born to a working-class family.
- 31 *F. M. the Life of Frederick Matthias Alexander* by Michael Bloch (Little Brown, 2004), p. 11.
- 32 *F. M. the Life of Frederick Matthias Alexander* by Michael Bloch (Little Brown, 2004), p. 12.
- 33 *F. M. the Life of Frederick Matthias Alexander* by Michael Bloch (Little Brown, 2004), p. 15.
- 34 F. M. Alexander letter to Irene Tasker, 22 October 1940, in *Letters Volume I 1916-1942* by F. Matthias Alexander. Edited by Missy Vineyard and Jean M. O. Fischer (Mouritz, 2020), p. 121.
- 35 See for example "A Respiratory Method" (1905) in *Articles and Lectures* by F. M. Alexander (Mouritz, 1995, London), pp. 27-29, and front cover facsimile on p. 49. See also various newspaper advertisements.
- 36 *Family Secrets: The Things We Tried to Hide* by Deborah Cohen (Penguin, 2014).
- 37 It was especially important for the sake of protecting illegitimate children from being taunted and mocked throughout their childhood (and perhaps later) for being a "bastard". Alexander had an illegitimate son with his friend and housekeeper of Penhill in 1931, which was kept a secret for many years.
- 38 *Family Secrets: The Things We Tried to Hide* by Deborah Cohen (Penguin, 2014), p. 47.
- 39 Podcasts: 'Francois Delsarte's Influence on F. Matthias Alexander and the Alexander Technique', Parts 1-12, Jeando Masoero interviewed by Robert Rickover. <https://bodylearningcast.com/delsarte/>.

- 40 As Masoero was not taught personally by Delsarte he is presumably relying on written sources. Therefore it should be possible to reference those sources.
- 41 *Walter Carrington on the Alexander Technique – In discussion with Séan Carey* (Sheildrake Press, 1986), p. 22. Republished as *Personally Speaking* (Mouritz, 2001).
- 42 *Articles and Lectures* by F. Matthias Alexander, edited by Jean M. O. Fischer (Mouritz, 1995), p. 13.
- 43 Facsimile copy of this prospectus is published in *Up From Down Under* by Rosslyn McLeod (Mouritz, 2017), pp. 202–05.
- 44 See “Reviews and notices of F. M. Alexander’s theatre performances 1901-02. Part One” and “Part Two”. PDFs available from <https://mouritz.org/library/articles/index>.
- 45 *Personally Speaking* by Walter Carrington, Séan Carey, (Mouritz, 2001 [1986]), pp. 31–32. In *Walter Carrington on the Alexander Technique – In discussion with Séan Carey* (Sheildrake Press, 1986), p. 22.
- 46 Both John Nicholls and Sean Carey recollect Walter Carrington talking about Alexander referring to Delsarte. Carrington said he remembered Alexander demonstrating the kind of body language and gestures he [Alexander] had learned from the Delsarte method to portray a character, for example a pickpocketing thief in the street. (John Nicholls, personal communication, November 2021.)
- 47 “Alexander told me that he had gotten his idea by reading James.” (Which “idea” is not clear from the context.) Kallen in *Dialogue on John Dewey* edited by Corliss Lamont (Horizon Press, New York, 1959), p. 27.
- 48 *Alexander’s Way – Frederick Matthias Alexander in His Own Words and in the Words of Those Who Knew Him* by Alexander D. Murray (Alexander Technique Center Urbana, 2015), p. 37.
- 49 *La méthode somatique expressive de François Delsarte – Histoire, esthétique, anthropologie* by Franck Waille (Entretemps, 2016).
- 50 See also *Trois décennies de recherche européenne sur François Delsarte* by Franck Waille (Editions L’Harmattan, 2011).
- 51 *Delsarte System of Expression* by Genevieve Stebbins (Dance Horizons, New York, 1977, a reproduction of a 1902 edition).
- 52 Examples of the exercises to be practised are: “*Exercise III*: Drop forearm from elbow as if dead; shake it. Vital force arrested at elbow.” (p. 85). “*Exercise V*: Drop head to one side decomposed; it will gradually describe a half-circle, moving from its own weight as you have seen persons asleep nodding. Drop back decomposed.” (p. 85). “*Exercise X*: Seat yourself squarely. Incline torso forward. Incline head back. Make this movement a simultaneous one. Now reverse above; i.e., incline torso back as you incline forward. Practice this for me half a dozen times – one! two! three! four! five! six! There, there, you forget; your head is not moving in opposition. Yes, you are right now. Attention!” (pp. 98–99).
- 53 *Delsarte System of Expression* by Genevieve Stebbins (Dance Horizons, New York, 1977), p. 83.

- 54 Alexander could also, theoretically, have read *The Delsarte System of Physical Culture* by Elanor Georgen (Butterick Publishing Company, New York, 1893). The book claims “The Delsarte System of Expression includes a series of gymnastics designed to strengthen and relax every muscle of the body. It is the most nearly perfect form of physical culture that we have.” (p. 5). Some of these exercises are to be performed in front of a mirror for the purpose of checking that the positions and movements are done correctly, see for example pp. 21, 25, 34, 49, 53, 54, 55, 85, 106. Or *The Art of Oratory: System of Delsarte*, from the French of M. L’Abbé Delaumosne and MME. Angelique Arnaud (Edgar S. Werner, second edition, 1884). The fact is that we don’t know what Alexander read on Delsarte.
- 55 <https://sydney.edu.au/paradisec/australharmony/del-sarte-camille-and-family.php>. Retrieved 24 December 2021.
- 56 E.g. there is no reference for the statement, “. . . Delsarte instructed his pupils to give the directions to their reflections in a mirror” (p. 319).
- 57 In this connection Easten cites her own “A new history of the Alexander Technique” blog as a reference, with the link as “alexandertechniqueinfo.org/blog”. However, I was not able to find a blog with such a title available on her website (16 December 2021).
- 58 Alexander had reprints made of several of these early articles and letters, and these were available for his pupils to read and to pick up at his teaching practice in Ashley Place. Walter Carrington collected copies of these and they are now part of the Walter Carrington archives.
- 59 *Articles and Lectures* by F. Matthias Alexander, edited by Jean M. O. Fischer (Mouritz, 1995).
- 60 See for example *The Universal Constant in Living* by F. Matthias Alexander (Mouritz, 2000), pp. 82–84, where Alexander writes about the pupil applying the principles in “all the simple and other acts of life” (p. 84).
- 61 *The Use of the Self* by F. Matthias Alexander (Methuen, 1939), pp. 69–88.
- 62 *Irene Tasker – Her Life and Work with the Alexander Technique* by Regina Stratil (Mouritz, 2020).
- 63 Goldie wrote two short letters in a magazine in 1957 and 1958. “Two Letters in Health for All” by Margaret Goldie. PDF <https://mouritz.org/library/articles/index>.
- 64 *Not to ‘Do’* by Fiona Mackenzie Robb (Camon Press, 1999).
- 65 <https://placelore.typepad.com>. Retrieved 6 November 2021.

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