

Kinesthetic Ventures

Informed by the Work of
F.M. Alexander
Stanislavski
Peirce &
Freud

Ed Bouchard

Alexander Technique
The Chicago Center

Ben Wright

University of
Chicago

Edited By Michael Protzel

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Dedicated to
Ordean Swenson
and
Bruno Bettelheim

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Ben began his scientific work as a physicist at Bell Laboratories and the University of Chicago. In 1950, he undertook a seven year study of child care workers at the University's Orthogenic School. This led to a Certificate in Psychoanalytic Child Care from the Chicago Institute for Psychoanalysis and a Ph.D. in Human Development from the University of Chicago.

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Preface

Kinesthetic Ventures is about an education harvested from self-observation. F. Matthias Alexander (1869-1955) studied the experience of self formation, working with motor habits. His method is used in performing arts training to enhance bodily and vocal expression. Like Alexander, Konstantine Stanislavski (1863-1938) and Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) studied human consciousness and found that emotion, body and mind are inextricably linked. Each in his own time developed means to overcome resistance to change. Each discovered that learning to not interfere with innate process can transform existence profoundly—and that interrupting habitual response is key.

To clarify the work of Alexander, Stanislavski and Freud, *Kinesthetic Ventures* applies Charles Sanders Peirce's (1839-1914) semiotic analysis of knowledge and action to the study of indirect learning processes.

Sensory experience, emotion and thought are body learned and body perpetuated. Without awareness of body habits, we are without a vital link to understanding our behavior, our consciousness, our self. Awareness of body together with a conscious not doing of habit is a means to regain our inherent poise, expand our freedom of choice, enrich our expressiveness and enhance our enjoyment of life.

You can observe a lot just by watching

Yogi Berra

Acknowledgments

Many persons contributed to this book. Ed was the Alexander teacher. Ben was the student. Ben saw the need for language to address the kinesthesia basic to the Alexander Technique. He suggested that we write about our experiences after each lesson. He introduced Peirce and Freud to our conversation. He insisted we write a book.

At first we wrote to understand our own reactions to the seemingly “inexplicable” kinesthetic work. In 1993 we began sending drafts to friends, colleagues and students: Walter Carrington, Walton White, Alex Murray, Jean M. O. Fischer, John Austin, Jeroen Staring, Suzanne Seed, Anne Wells, Cecelia Burokas, Kimberly Furst, Khristine Shields, Kate Oberjat, Bob Addison and Michael Protzel. Alex Murray and Jeroen Staring shared hard to find papers. Walton White’s suggestions helped immensely. Cameron Poulter gave us a design. Jeroen Staring contributed many insights that we incorporated into the text.

Walter Carrington’s comment that our writing was “fascinating” but hard to follow summarized our early readers’ feedback. As we explored the twists and turns of our sources, we had developed a shorthand that made it difficult for an outsider to join.

Michael Protzel, Alexander Technique teacher, former editor of a journal for Alexander teachers and book publisher with interest in philosophy and psychoanalysis offered his editorial skills. His contributions to the clarity and flow of this book are decisive. He spent hours reading successive drafts—exhorting us to simplify and pare our narrative to its utter essence.

We appreciate Julie Paparella for her lively illustrations—and thank Kathleen Ballard, Deborah Caplan, Jeremy Chance, Ted Dimon, David Garlick, Alex Murray, Gretchen Sommers, Chris Stevens, The Alexander Technique Archives, The Center for Dewey Studies and *Direction* Magazine for permission to use drawings and photographs.

We dedicate this book to Ordean Swenson, Ed’s deaf foster father who taught him the value of non-verbal communication, and to Ben’s teacher Bruno Bettelheim who showed him the humane rewards of a psychoanalytic life. Ed also thanks his foster mother Gladys Swenson, Martha Hall, Joe Tenuta, Tex Richardson, Hubert Lui and his first Alexander Technique teacher Goddard Binkley. Ben thanks his steadfast mother, Professor Dorothy Wright and his extraordinary wife Claire.

Ed Bouchard
Ben Wright
Chicago, 1997

Introduction

This book began as conversation during Ben Wright's Alexander Technique (AT) lessons with Ed Bouchard after a friend convinced Ben to try AT as a way to ease a stiff neck.

Ben teaches psychology, philosophy of science, measurement theory and statistical analysis at the University of Chicago. Ben learned psychoanalysis when he worked with disturbed children at Bruno Bettelheim's Orthogenic School. He taught teachers and social workers psychoanalytic child care at the Chicago Institute for Psychoanalysis. Ed teaches AT, acts and writes.

Ben was skeptical about AT. But his first AT lesson led him to an experience of effortless standing that astonished him. He returned to see whether this surprising experience could happen again. It did—again and again!

Ed seemed shy and unsure. He did not offer Ben an explanation of what he was doing or of what was going to happen. That anything happened struck Ben as amazing.

Ben learned how to alter the maladaptive postural habits that kept his neck stiff. His neck got better. The concomitant effect of Alexander lessons on his psyche aroused Ben's curiosity.

“Alexander is vital, but elusive. I can't put my experience into words. What is it? I can't explain it, even to myself. You and I allude to it in haphazard conversation. But I can't explain it to my wife. I can't explain it to my colleagues. Yet I am changing. My shoulder and neck feel better. I walk easier. My voice is deeper, fuller, more fun. I want a language to talk about this Alexander Technique—a language that will be useful to any pupil or teacher.”

Ed described AT as a method to address muscular habits that impede performance, cause neck and back pain, provoke injury. Because we become accustomed to maintaining unconscious and unnecessary tension, our habitual tensing feels normal. A vicious circle evolves that is difficult to break. AT lessons bring the faulty habits that interfere with postural coordination into awareness and gradually clarify a way of not-invoking these faulty habits before they start.

Ben was dissatisfied with Ed's explanation. Ben found that

“AT lessons make me younger, more interested in life. I feel less helpless, in better control. I was expiring in a gradually deteriorating body. I had given up hope of doing anything about it. AT lessons put me in touch with myself, with a way of communicating with myself which enables me to become actively involved in, even to enjoy, how my body lives from moment to moment.

“This is rejuvenating, liberating. It makes me less depressed about the finality of aging. AT has become my antidote to death. I live more, in a thousand little ways. I live when I get up from a chair. I live when I sit down on a chair. I live when I walk to my office. As I discover better ways to walk, instead of a trying burden, walking becomes a joyous pleasure, a romp. (There’s a good trick to play on the devil!) I also think better. I am having new ideas in my work, ideas I never dared, creative ideas.”

Ben could not see how to explain the impact of AT to himself, let alone to anyone else. He knew from his scientific work that unless others could do something that would cause them to have these experiences, they would not recognize them as real:

“If the contributions of the Alexander Technique remain buried in an Alexander religion, they will never become knowledge. AT will remain a cult. Eventually it will drift into oblivion as the faithful die out and everyone else forgets what it is. AT teachers do not communicate AT outside of a lesson. Alexander’s concepts are not objectified. Phrases in Alexander’s and his followers’ writings contain seeds, strings of reasoning that ring bells, relate to physiology and philosophy. But, unfortunately, the few physiological tidbits that have been harvested do not add up to an enduring or convincing story. When connections remain buried in the mute Alexander Technique, the facts scatter like pebbles on a beach. They do not make a house. Someone has to envision the Alexander house, gather its pebbles and build it.”

Our post lesson conversations evoked associations between the AT lesson experience and the work of Freud, Stanislavski, Sanford Meisner, Georg Groddeck, John Dewey, William James and the bodymind science of Antonio Damasio, Gerald Edelman, Mark Johnson, Fred Levin and Israel Rosenfield. These associations evolved into a new understanding of what AT might be, suggesting links between our subjective experience of AT and the languages of psychology, neuroscience and philosophy.

Then we discovered that Charles Sanders Peirce, long ago, had begun an elegant and comprehensive schema to demonstrate how we synthesize experience into language and knowledge. Peirce’s semiotics helps us to organize the vocabularies of physiology, kinesiology, psychology, psychoanalysis and the performing arts into an idiom that communicates the pre-lingual sensory experience of an AT lesson.

In this book we look for words to make the processes and results of AT education recognizable and understandable.