

The Expanding Self

The raspberry plants look wonderful. It will be a good crop which I won't be here to enjoy, but my tenants will.

June 23, 1951

I have been so busy but feeling so wonderful in spite of what has happened with Morrell and me. I am beginning a new life. I feel new forces in myself—as if unleashed. For the first time in my life I feel like *acting* in the world. I'm getting impatient with discussion and analysis, impatient with words—I want only to *allow and do*.

Part II

MY LESSONS WITH F. MATTHIAS ALEXANDER

1951 — 1953

July 4, 1951

After a stimulating and restful six-day voyage on the Atlantic, we disembarked at Plymouth, England. We had Paul's small van on the boat with us, and so, after loading our baggage and ourselves into it, we set out for a friend's house in Byfleet, Surrey, about 30 miles south-west of London. We arrived at 2:00 in the morning.

July 11, 1951

My first meeting with F. M. Alexander, at 16 Ashley Place, about a five-minute walk from London's Victoria Station. I was admitted by the secretary, John Skinner,⁴⁴ who sat down with me in the waiting room. We talked about Alexander's work and the training course. I learned that there are ten students in the teachers' training course who worked every day, except weekends, for three hours per day, that the minimum period of study for a teacher's certificate is three years, and that Alexander had tried working with pupils as a group but had found this unsatisfactory. Other than Alexander, there are about a half-a-dozen teachers in London. After about twenty minutes, Mr. Skinner showed me into Alexander's teaching room, the room where, as I already knew, Alexander had been teaching for forty years.

The feeling I had from the moment I entered the room—and this feeling was to grow during the lesson—was one of timelessness; that is to say, of time as we usually think of it having no importance.

The room looked to me as I thought it must have looked in 1910, when Alexander acquired these rooms and taught his first pupil in it. The woodwork was dark-stained, the walls beige-colored, liberally hung with pictures, including a large portrait in oils of Alexander, and a series of antique china plates grouped around the mantelpiece. On a wide and deep sofa against the wall by the door was an enormous round pillow covered in black silk. In the far corner near the windows facing the street was a desk stacked with books. On the mantelpiece, judiciously placed, were numerous *objets d'art*. Against the wall to the right as one entered the room, and behind Alexander's Queen Anne teaching-chair which faced the front windows, stood a stately grandfather's clock that sedately tick-tocked away the seconds. Whether or not it was true, I felt that nothing had been significantly changed in this room from the day Alexander taught his first pupil in it, to the moment of my standing there.

Beyond all this the feeling of timelessness was due to the character of the man who now entered the room and whom I liked on the instant. His eighty-three years showed in his white hair and lined face, but those years were belied by the warmth, intelligence and vitality that emanated from him. His

figure was slim and erect, and his hair beautifully white and abundant. He greeted me warmly and began the lesson.

The lesson was the third thing that gave me the sense of timelessness: the sense, paradoxically, of time passing and having passed, yet, at the same time, the sense of something permanent, constant and inviolate throughout this passage; for I had the knowledge that this aged, creative and fully alive man was teaching me, in this Victorian room, a principle of growth and change biologically rooted in man as an organism.

I thought at that moment of my own country with its ceaseless quest for novelty, for any kind of change so long as what is brought forth is new, a quest so compulsive and pervasive that family life was becoming fraught with restlessness, dissatisfactions and anxieties.

But here now was a man who had discovered a primary principle of change and growth in man as a species, and who had devised a technique for teaching this principle to others. He was clearly not interested in effecting or seeking changes in the ordinary accoutrements of living which are, on the face of it, so important to the satisfactions of most other men.

And if civilization, or civilized life as we have come to know it, is rushing headlong to a violent end, could this be partly or indirectly attributed to the fact that man has all but lost the art of growth and change within himself—which depends, as Alexander's work has so clearly demonstrated, on the development of man's inhibitory powers—and that he is now almost universally ignorant of his power to reclaim it?

I was with him this first visit for little more than a quarter of an hour. He talked little while using his hands on me, asking a few questions now and then. The touch of his hands was something I'll always remember, gentle, with now and again light, gradual pressure. Standing at my left, he put his left hand on top of my head while his right hand explored my back. I felt as though he sensed my entire being. It made me glow!

July 16, 1951

Occasionally I have to remind myself that I am in England. Of course, all that one sees is a reminder, but you can look about and forget your strangeness; feeling quite as if you have lived all your life here. I do feel "at home" in England, so much so that it makes me wonder if I should have always lived here. When I think back to just a month, even less than a month ago, and South Salem, New York, I am amazed at the transition, the sudden and complete change from one life to another. I know I am on the threshold of a new and wonderful life. But I have a touch of anxiety, the anxiety one experiences when confronted with the unknown.

This week I will see Alexander on Wednesday, taking Anne and Paul with me.

July 18, 1951

After lunch, Anne, Paul and I went to see Alexander. I for my second lesson, they for their first. Afterwards, they said they felt weightless and floating—they were amazed.

I saw Alexander once more before leaving in early August with Anne and Paul to travel by car in France, Italy and Switzerland. I returned to London in early September.

September 7, 1951

On August 30, I said good-bye to Anne and Paul in Paris. They drove to Le Havre and set sail for America the next day. I returned to London yesterday with no hotel reservations and everything booked up. But Hotel Bookings, Ltd. got me a "service flat" in Cork Street, in the heart of the West End.

I went to see Alexander today with the intention of finding out if I could join the teachers' training course. After some discussion, we agreed that in view of the uncertainties about my time over here and about my own life plans, I should continue with the private lessons. We had a good talk, and among other things he said the following:

"The best thing to do is to wait until you can make a decision and then stick to it. You know, teaching this work is a wonderful career, a wonderful career, but very difficult. The training course is three years, but it ought to be six years. This is so true that sometimes I've felt like giving up the course altogether."

"Of all my pupils, including John Dewey, [Aldous] Huxley, the Archbishop of Canterbury,⁴⁵ [Sir Stafford] Cripps,⁴⁶ Bernard Shaw,⁴⁷ no one of all my pupils was ever able to keep to the decision to not do what they felt was the right thing to do. That's the trouble."

For the trouble is that when reason is so far held in check that it loses its power of denial, it must have lost its power of control.

(MSL, p. 102)

"People always try to do the right thing, whereas they should concentrate on not doing the wrong thing. They have an idea of what is right, but because of the sensory appreciation they have or bring with them, their idea of the right is wrong."

...in any attempt to make necessary changes in himself, man would need to do what *feels wrong* in order to be right.

(MSI, p. vii)

"I tell a pupil to 'sit down,' but then I say, 'Don't give consent.' You see, I have to give the stimulus to do the wrong thing, otherwise there is no opportunity for him to say 'no' to doing the wrong thing, to say: 'No, I will not sit down!' Isn't that true? And yet it nearly always happens that when I tell a pupil to 'sit down but do not give consent,' he will still try to sit down. That's the trouble."

"If I had the time, I could write half-a-dozen books on just this one thing, 'sitting down' - for everything is all there in the simple act of 'sitting down.'"

"We want to change. But how are we going to change if we go about doing things the way we have always done them? Yet, people are never able to grasp this idea. And after all these years I know why this is so: none of our education has ever directed us to do differently."

...a human being functions as a whole and can only be fundamentally changed as a whole.

(MSI, p. vi)

"You know, I've so often found that even the most diploma'd men are the stupidest. A friend of mine wanted me to meet one of the most educated, one of the most diploma'd men alive. I met the man, a doctor, and I never met a more stupid man. I said to my friend, 'What did you want me to meet that damn fool for? I'm a fool and I know it, but he's a damn fool and doesn't know it.'"

"But my work has penetrated, there's no doubt about it. Twenty or thirty years ago, I was condemned for using the terms 'psycho-physical,' 'means vs. ends,' 'means whereby,' and so on, but today they are commonplace."

...I have persistently avoided using words which are labels for ideas and "systems" which I am convinced are fundamentally unsound... If the reader will remember that the subject of my study has been, and is, the living psycho-physical organism, which is the sum of a complex of unified processes, he will understand why I refrain as far as is possible from using such terms as "postures," "mental states," "psychological complexes," "body mechanics," "subconscious," or any of the thousand and one labelled concepts which have, like barnacles, become attached to the complicated idea we have of ourselves owing to the

kind of education to which we have been subjected. Instead I prefer to call the psycho-physical organism simply "the self," and to write of it as something "in use," which "functions" and which "reacts." My conception of the human organism or of the self is thus very simple, but can be made difficult by needless complication resulting from the preconceived ideas which readers bring to it.

(UCL, pp. xxxii-xxxiii)

"Don't think that I don't appreciate your coming to me. I do. I always appreciate it when young men and women come to me. I don't understand it sometimes, but they do come. For I know what you went through before you came to me: nothing you ever learned or experienced, nothing that was ever taught you, prepared you to come to me, did it? [No!] There, you see, but yet you came."

"Well now, you come to me as you've decided—you are staying here for three months at least, you've made that decision—and you will be able to see better what the difficulties are. Then you can decide what you want to do; and we will do it. Whatever you decide you want me to do, I will do it."

"Your great compatriot, Dewey, once asked me at a dinner we attended together what I would regard as the best test of a person. I replied, 'A person who can make a decision not to do a certain thing and then stick to that decision.'"

September 8, 1951

Today the thought came to me that I might learn to inhibit negative or unconstructive thoughts and feelings about myself in the same way that I am learning to inhibit the impulse to stand up or to sit down—simply by saying No! If negative thoughts and feelings don't produce constructive self-criticism or creative work, they waste energy, are self-defeating and end in depression. The Alexander Technique provides the means to redirect the energy.

Every living human being is a psycho-physical unity equipped with marvellous mechanisms, and it is through these when set in motion by the stimulus of some desire or need that all reactions take place. Every reaction, therefore, is associated with a particular manner of use of these mechanisms and, because of the closeness of the association, it is this manner of use that constantly influences all manifestations of human activity, whether labelled manual or mental.

(UCL, p. 3)

September 11, 1951

Alexander talked considerably, and I had, I thought, a good lesson. At its conclusion he seemed pleased, and we said good-bye till Thursday.

He began the lesson by remarking on the weather, what a good day this was for a change. He said he had reports from friends in many places of erratic weather; and of all the places he had been, London really had the nicest weather when it was good, especially in the spring. Then he turned to matters concerned with the lesson.

"To change one's habits, that's the hardest thing of all. And in all the years I've been teaching, no one, not excepting the great people I've had as pupils, including the two in your country, Dewey and Coghill, was able to keep to the decision *not* to 'sit down' after I told him not to give consent to the order to 'sit down.' In the beginning that is—afterwards, they learned it."

Habit, indeed, may be defined as the manifestation of a constant.

(UCL, p. 6)

...I use the word "habit" in its widest sense, as the embodiment of all instinctive and other human reactions which observation shows to be determined by the manner of use of the self as a constant influence operating for or against us under given circumstances and at a given time.

(UCL, p. 80)

"In all our activities, we tend to pull our heads back and contract or shorten ourselves. We give ourselves an order or direction to do a certain thing, and then we fight against ourselves in doing it. Whereas the head naturally wants to go forward and up and the back to lengthen and widen. That's all there is to it. But it works. Whatever we may think about it, there it is!"

"You allow the head to go forward and up and the back to lengthen and widen. When the back widens, this takes the pressure of the ribs off the lungs, thus allowing breathing to become naturally deeper, allowing the ribs to expand and contract, giving freedom to the floating ribs. My technique, because of its effect on breathing, has stopped cases of angina. What happens when people suddenly suffer pain? They contract, pulling themselves down and inwards—[Alexander demonstrated this contraction by pulling his arms close to his body and hunching over]—whereas, if they would undo themselves, they would be all right. It's the undoing that is so important. I

once had an epileptic pupil, and during a fit he pulled his head back so far that it touched between his shoulder blades."

"In the middle of your chest, there's a bone, the sternum, and the upper ribs are attached to it. Farther down, the ribs remain unattached. Put your hands on me, and you will feel the floating ribs."

Mr. Alexander turned his back to me and directed me to place my hands just above his waist. At first I pressed a little, as if I should try to probe or feel for his ribs. But he said, "Don't press, just let me place your hands." He did so, and then I observed a most remarkable movement in his breathing. Alexander is of slight build and, therefore, one ordinarily would not expect to find such a capacity for expansion and contraction in rib movement. Nevertheless, here was this movement, all so free, easy and regular. He called my attention to the fact that I could hear no sucking or gasping of his breath. I was frankly amazed, and I said to him that I had no idea such movement in breathing was possible, a movement that was confined, it seemed, almost entirely to his back. He replied: "You have a wonderful frame and soon will have a beautiful movement down here," and he placed his hands in the region of the floating ribs.

"That which we would not do, we do; that which we should do, we do not."⁴⁸ Do you know that? It is in the Bible, and when I read it, I thought it was such a pathetic confession. I don't often read the Bible, because there is so much in it I can't agree with. But that sentence is so pathetic a confession, don't you agree?"

"We talk about the subconscious. Well, this is one way of looking at this work: we are raising the subconscious to consciousness, so that we govern ourselves by consciousness alone."

September 13, 1951

A good lesson. Mr. Alexander asked me to tell him why I wished to go into the teachers' training course. I told him I was deeply interested in the work and I believed, as a result of my experience so far, that teaching the Technique would be a profoundly interesting, useful and satisfying career. The upshot of our talk at today's lesson was that Alexander suggested I enter the training course on a provisional basis for one year, but that we postpone a final decision until the next lesson the following week. He said that it was obvious to him that I was very interested in the work and that he never wanted to make the mistake of discouraging young people having such interest.

September 17, 1951

Mr. Alexander said he thought it might be unwise for me to join the teachers' training course because of the current troubled and uncertain conditions on the international scene. It might be difficult to maintain the school and there was even the possibility of my having to return to America prematurely. Under these circumstances, he said, it would be better to continue with our private lessons. I was sorely disappointed but nevertheless decided to do as he suggested.

My "disappointment" didn't last too long, because I soon realized, had I at this time entered the training course, I would very likely have forfeited these lessons with F. M. Alexander.

September 19, 1951

A very good lesson. Alexander talked quite a lot, and he appeared to be in more than his usually good humor. He joked about matters ordinarily calling for sober reflection, and mimicked the speech of the Irishman Cheiro, the famous palmist.⁴⁹ He looked most elegant in a dark blue, double-breasted suit and bow tie. His eyes are brilliantly blue, his face sensitive and finely lined. His head, neck and back all seem to be linked up together as one harmonious unit. He talked about his meeting with Cheiro and how the latter had prophesied the purchase of 16 Ashley Place, Alexander's teaching quarters. Alexander said there was much in this matter of reading the hands—"No doubt," he said, "that hands show history." About the so-called extra-sensory capacities: "Persons who have this can't explain it, or tell how they do what they do. We can't explain any of these things from our present subconscious way of doing things. But we'll be able to explain a lot of these things from the more conscious level of action."

...at some period of his evolutionary progress the human creature must have reached a psychological moment to pass from the subconscious to the conscious plane of control.

The change from a subconscious to a conscious plane of control would have involved a knowledge on man's part of the *means whereby* he would be able to command a conscious, reasoning direction and control of his psycho-physical mechanisms in all activity.

(CCCL, p. 5)

He joked about some men repairing the street in front of the house: "It's an awful business—they don't do anything, you know. What's going to happen

when people in countries like Japan get back to rebuilding their civilizations, while we over here have forgotten how to work?"

"We want to get rid of the idea that we can't go ahead and do a thing. When we do something well one day, but fail the next—that's an awful business. We don't want that, do we?"

"Life is the developing of conscious control and confidence."

Confidence is born of success, not of failure, and our processes in education and in the general art of living must be based upon principles which will enable us to make certain of the satisfactory *means whereby* an end may be secured, and thus to command a large percentage of those satisfactory experiences which develop confidence, as against a small percentage of those unsatisfactory experiences which tend to undermine our confidence and make us unhappy.

(CCCL, p. 185)

Health in living... may be defined as the best possible reaction of the organism to the stimuli of living as manifested in its use and functioning. To ensure this we require as a *constant* the best possible manner of use and the highest possible standard of functioning at a given time, in a given environment, and under given circumstances; and this I submit constitutes the ideal of human attainment in the field in which we are interested.

(UCL, p. 68)

September 20, 1951

Excellent lesson. Alexander seemed pleased.

He said little and then only of things concerned with the lesson. I was again impressed how in sitting down or standing up we thwart our intentions. When rising from a chair we tend to pull the head backwards while thrusting the torso forwards, thus doubling or tripling the energy needed to get up from the chair. In sitting down in a chair, instead of simply allowing the knees to go forward, we duck the head down or pull it back on to the neck while sort of hunching the torso forward and stiffening the legs and then falling backwards into the chair. When we perform such acts not once but many times in a day, the cost to the organism must be considerable.

The word *co-ordination* is ordinarily used at the present time in as narrow and limited a sense as the words relaxation, readjustment, re-education, etc.

I use the word *co-ordination*, both in its conception and in its appli-

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cation, to convey the idea of co-ordination on a general and not a specific basis. Specific co-ordination of any specific part of the organism, such as the muscles of the arm or leg, may be brought about by means of a direct process, during which process, however, new defects in the use of the organism in general will certainly be cultivated, whilst others already present will become more pronounced. These harmful conditions will not be cultivated if the specific co-ordination is brought about by means of an indirect process involving, primarily, the general co-ordination of the psycho-physical organism—that is to say, an integrated condition in which all the factors continue to make for satisfactory psycho-mechanical use.

Co-ordinated use of the organism means that there is satisfactory control of a complex mechanism.

(CCCI, pp. 8-9)

September 24, 1951

Best lesson so far! Alexander said: "You're doing beautifully!" And I knew I was. I couldn't help but smile during much of the lesson. After a particularly good moment, he walked a few steps away, as he always does when he has something special to say, and said: "There, you have it! Now that you have it, you can't make a mistake."

October 1, 1951

Alexander said very little this lesson, one which proved difficult for me. I came away impressed once more, and increasingly so, by the great obstacles that habit places in your path when this path is a new one. The difficulty I experienced during this lesson seems to contradict the awareness I had of much progress the preceding week. Actually, there is no contradiction. Because each lesson brings something new. You see something you didn't see before and really couldn't see, simply because you did not and could not know it was there to be seen. But this is not quite right either, for the "something" that you can now see this week simply was not there to be seen last week.

The following passage from John Dewey's introduction to Alexander's *The Use of the Self* is very much to the point of the above entry:

The vitality of a scientific discovery is revealed and tested in its power to project and direct new further operations which not only harmonize with prior results, but which lead on to new observed ma-

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terials, suggesting in turn further experimentally controlled acts, and so on in a continued series of new developments. Speaking as a pupil, it was because of this fact as demonstrated in personal experience that I first became convinced of the scientific quality of Mr. Alexander's work. Each lesson was a laboratory experimental demonstration. Statements made in advance of consequences to follow and the means by which they would be reached were met with implicit scepticism—a fact which is practically inevitable, since, as Mr. Alexander points out, one uses the very conditions that need re-education as one's standard of judgment. Each lesson carries the process somewhat farther and confirms in the most intimate and convincing fashion the claims that are made. *As one goes on, new areas are opened, new possibilities are seen and then realized; one finds himself continually growing, and realizes that there is an endless process of growth initiated.*

(UoS, p. xix, my italics)

October 3, 1951

Alexander talked a lot today.

"A compatriot of yours has just left. She's come over here to take lessons. There are three of you Americans here now, but before the war we used to have as many as sixteen here at one time. Oh yes, oh yes."

"Why, when I taught in New York, I worked all day long, from eight in the morning to eight at night. From about 1914 to 1924, my brother and I alternated, six months in London, then six months in New York."

"A time came in my work when I knew I had something that shouldn't be lost, and I needed support in order to go ahead with my teaching. So I went to New York, on the Lusitania, the first ship to go through the submarine patrols. On my arrival, I gave a few speeches to some important people, and the result was that the way was cleared for me to go ahead. A friend suggested I set up headquarters in the Essex Hotel. I went there and got a suite of three rooms, a beautiful hotel. I asked the price, and they told me it would be \$3,000 for four months. Oh, my dear boy, what was I to do? I had no idea it would be that. I thought it over, and then I proposed an agreement on the results of the first two weeks of my teaching. They accepted, and the results were so good, I could go ahead."

Because of the war, Alexander received his Government's permission to evacuate the children of his school to America. The school took children of ages three to eight and was established in 1924 at Alexander's teaching quarters in London. Some years later, however, the school was moved to

Bexley, Kent, where Alexander had purchased a home. Much to Alexander's regret, it was not feasible to re-establish the school after the war. However, its sojourn in America was sufficient to give birth to a similar school in the United States under the supervision of A. R. Alexander.⁵⁰

"In 1941, the Whitney Homestead at Stow, Massachusetts, was turned over to us rent-free to set up our school for children. Oh, it was a beautiful place, a large house with much acreage."

"When I went to New York [during World War II] I found everything changed. None of the people I had known in the old days [1914-1924] were there any more. All those people of so much fine taste were gone. London is changed, too. It isn't like it used to be in the wonderful days from 1904 to 1914."

"Oh my, I've had all the advantages of life. My father's and grandfather's estate was passed on to us... Then coming to London in the beautiful period from 1904 to 1914. ... And then, too, knowing the good people in New York during the years I taught there."

"Once I was at a party in New York, and we had to open seven bottles of fine old wine before we found one that hadn't been spoiled from being kept in an over-heated cellar. Wine and cigars need a constant natural temperature. I have a room here, situated in the middle of all this string of houses, that never varies in temperature, winter or summer, and I keep my cigars there. The cellar, too, is the same way."

"The hardest thing in the world for us is to keep to a decision. That's why I put a chapter on it in my last book. John Dewey once asked me at a dinner we attended together, what would be my test of a person. Well, I said, a man who can decide what the thing is he should do and then sticks to his decision to do that and not some other thing. You see, we decide to do a thing, and then we find out the means whereby that thing can be done."

"Oh, Dewey was a bad pupil, as he'll tell you himself. He had many lessons. But it saved him. He's an old boy of 89 or so now. When first he came to me, in 1914 or '15, he was like this—[Alexander stooped over and shook his hands nervously]."

In the above entry, Alexander clearly implies that Dewey's lessons in the Technique enabled him to live his long and productive life. From all accounts, it seems that Dewey himself agreed with this. The following passage is from Max Eastman's *Heroes I Have Known* (1942).⁵¹ The reference to Alexander as a "physician" is, of course, wrong:

...[Dewey] had recourse to a very unconventional physician named Matthias Alexander, who opened a new chapter in his life. Dr. Alexander is an Australian of original but uncultivated mind [sic], attacked by the medical profession, but possessed in Dewey's opinion of a valid theory about posture and muscular control, and a technique of "re-education" by which human beings are supposed to recover that integration of the organism which is natural to animals. Dr. Alexander has been endorsed by others as brainy as Bernard Shaw and Aldous Huxley, and his system undoubtedly worked in Dewey's case. "I used to shuffle and sag," he says. "Now, I hold myself up." Every one of his friends will endorse that assertion. And when he adds that "a person gets old because he bends over," it is difficult to argue with him, for he is obviously an expert on not getting old. It is simply impossible to believe when you see him that he has been around since 1859! Dewey gives 90 per cent of the credit for this to Dr. Alexander, 10 per cent to a regular physician who taught him to keep things moving through the alimentary canal.

"My boy, as I've told you before, you have such a beautiful back, I wish I had it, and it's a great shame if you don't use it. Once you get that widening of your back, you will be all set. And you get it by allowing the head to go forward and up, by freeing the neck..."

October 8, 1951

A very good lesson. I think I made a big jump ahead today. After a question from me, Alexander told me about the large muscles of the back that "never tire," what some physiologists call the "anti-gravity" muscles.

Alexander said that it was only after ten years of intensive self-observation, working with mirrors, that he discovered what he called the primary control, the "mechanism" that governs the distribution of muscle tonus to the trunk and limbs, influencing, directly or indirectly, the working of the body musculature. When our manner of use is such that we interfere with the primary control, so then do we restrict ourselves, in one way or another, in performing an act or movement.

Perhaps the best description of the primary control to be found in Alexander's books is the following from *The Universal Constant in Living*, pp. 6-7:

...I discovered that a certain use of the head in relation to the neck, and of the head and neck in relation to the torso and the other parts of the organism, if consciously and continuously employed, en-

tures, as was shown in my own case, the establishment of a manner of use of the self as a whole which provides the best conditions for raising the standard of the functioning of the various mechanisms, organs, and systems. I found that in practice this use of the parts, beginning with the use of the head in relation to the neck, constituted a primary control of the mechanism as a whole, involving control in process right through the organism, and that when I interfered with the employment of the primary control of my manner of use, this was always associated with a lowering of the standard of my general functioning.

October 10, 1951

A good lesson. At one point I felt my lower back shift backwards without any "doing" on my part. I mentioned it to Alexander, and he said: "That's where it belongs."

At one point during the lesson, Alexander said:

"You're not thinking connectedly."

"The less you do, the better off you will be."

"Why, your back has terrific power. You could lift twenty times your own weight with it. It's a crime if you don't use it."

"In 20 or 30 years, people are going to be madly trying to take lessons in my technique. I won't see it, but you will. And why? Because by that time people will realize that something has to be done."

The blind continue to lead the blind in the twentieth century as in the days of the cave-man, but the process brings with it more disastrous results in our time than was possible in those early days of man's more limited spheres of psycho-physical activities.

(CCCL, p. 176)

October 17, 1951

I have been very discouraged the past week, which included two lessons for which I have made no entry. I see now that, in spite of myself, I am still trying to do, trying to feel, etc.

During today's lesson, Alexander certainly noted the difficulty I was having. He stopped his teaching, stepped a few paces away, and said:

"You know, if one ever expects to teach this work, one must above all, first and foremost, have acquired a fully adequate standard of conscious control in the use of himself. For without this, a teacher cannot convey at all or in any way hope to give to the pupil the experiences necessary for learning the Technique. Why, if you should watch some of the teachers in the train-

ing course, you would see exactly what I mean. I walked in one day, and one of them called to me for assistance, saying he could do nothing with the particular student he was working on. I didn't look at the latter at all, only at this would-be teacher, and said, 'No wonder, look at what you're doing with yourself in the process of trying to teach him!'"

"Another young man who has had almost two years in the course, came to me today, and I said to him: 'My dear fellow, you will never be able to teach this work, since you have never yet succeeded in abandoning the idea of trying to sit down, of trying to stand up, and so forth.'"

All of the above paragraphs are concerned, in one way or another, with what Alexander calls *end-gaining*.

According to...the end-gaining conception, all that is necessary when an end is desired is to proceed to employ the different parts of the organism in the manner which our feeling dictates as necessary for the carrying out of the movements required for gaining the end, irrespective of any harmful effects due to misuse of the self during the process...

It will be seen therefore that end-gaining involves the conception and procedure of going *direct for an end* without consideration as to whether the "means-whereby" to be employed are the best for the purpose, or as to whether there should be substituted for these, new and improved "means whereby" which, in their employment, would necessarily involve change in the manner of use of the self.

(UCL, p. 10)

"Why, Mr. Binkley, when I am teaching you, as I do now, I am able to convey to you what I want to convey, because as I touch you, and guide you with my hands in carrying out my instructions, I, myself, am going up! up! up!"

October 25, 1951

At the end of this lesson, Alexander said to me: "Don't imagine you have had a bad or a disappointing lesson. For we had a good lesson, the way a lesson should be. It's the way I would like to have all my lessons, if my pupils would only let me!"

It had happened twice during this lesson that, when Alexander was ready to take me out of the chair to a standing position, I simply could not be moved but was like a rock. For I had decided that if I could not follow

Alexander's instructions I was simply going to do absolutely nothing at all, that I was going to resist with all my might the temptation to push myself up with my legs. It was only later that I realised that this firm refusal on my part to do anything at all actually involved a decision to do something, i.e. to resist, rather than a decision to allow.

In my experience, as soon as the pupil is asked not to do anything, he will immediately show all those signs of strain and fixity of attention that he shows when he is asked to do something, and which we have learned to associate with any attempt at concentration. Point this out to the pupil, and he will answer, nine times out of ten, "I am trying to do nothing!" He actually believes that he has something to do to do nothing. To such a point can we be led by our belief in concentration!

(CCCL, p. 164)

When it is explained to... a pupil that inhibition is the first step in his re-education, that his apprehensive fear that he may be doing wrong and his intense desire to do right are the secrets of his failure, he will invariably endeavour to prevent himself from doing anything, by exerting force usually in the opposite direction.

(MSI, p. 154)

So, while, at the time, I had felt stupid and chagrined at my apparent failure to follow Alexander's instructions, I left Ashley Place feeling very good about his parting words. I suspected that the struggle I was having would be, in the end, at least my particular key to learning the Technique and making its principle a permanent acquisition.

And, today, I saw myself nude in a full-length mirror for the first time since beginning lessons with Alexander. And I was almost startled to observe a flexibility in my torso, in expansion and contraction during breathing, that was completely new to my eyes.

...a gradual improvement will be brought about in the pupil's sensory appreciation, so that he will become more and more aware of faults in his habitual manner of using himself; correspondingly, as with this increasing awareness the manner of his use of himself improves, his sensory appreciation will further improve, and in time constitute a standard *within the self* by means of which he will become increasingly aware both of faults and of improvement, not only in the

manner of his use, but also in the standard of his functioning generally.

(UoS, p. 43)

For instance, with the improvement in his use he will become aware of an increase in the expansion and contraction of the thorax—i.e., of the degree of thoracic mobility. Reliability of the sensory register is essential to all who would make permanent changes from unsatisfactory to satisfactory conditions of functioning.

(*Ibid.*)

November 2, 1951

Alexander said to me today: "As I've told you so often, you have such a powerful back that when you do misuse yourself, you do it twice as badly as the next fellow!"

During the lesson I had fallen over backwards and grabbed hold of Alexander's arm with one hand and the back of the chair with the other in order to keep from falling altogether on the floor.

Lately I have felt a very severe strain or pull on the top of my thighs while sitting in the chair during the lessons. On these occasions it has been a positive relief to me when Alexander has taken me to a more forward position on the chair. I mentioned this to him. He immediately placed his hands on my thighs and said: "But, you see, there is no tension there. Feel them yourself." I did so and could feel that the muscles were indeed free from undue tension, not tightened up as they had felt. He said I was experiencing a "new pull," that where I felt strain, there was no strain. And so this was only another indication of the unreliability of my feelings or sensory appreciation. He said you must test with your hands in order to determine what is actually the case, since we cannot rely on the sensory feeling.

In answer to a question I put to him about breathing, he said: "Don't say to yourself, 'Now I am going to breathe!' Pay no attention to it. Only, free your neck, allow the head to go forward and up—this brings about a contraction of the ribs, forcing the breath outwards, and then, at a certain point, air will, at its own pressure, enter to fill the lungs, expanding the rib-cage, widening the back."

I think it is important for me, for anyone who wants to understand this work, to realize that the neck being free, the head going forward and up, the back lengthening and widening, the ribs contracting and expanding, etc.—that these activities are parts of one continuous connected event or process.

It is also important not to rely on feeling as a guide in freeing the neck and directing the head forward and up, etc. As Alexander continually points out,

reliance on feeling results in trying to make the head go forward and up, rather than *allowing* it to do so. With the energy of the *directing* process, the head will go forward and up when the neck is free—when one stops pulling the head back and down or forward and down and when one stops tensing the neck. It is a question of thinking the matter out, of determining just what it is we are doing that interferes with the *primary control* and to stop the interference.

In *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual*, p. 88, Alexander writes: "...volition is used to name *what we intend to do*, and inhibition to name *what we refuse to do*..." But there is no hard and fast line separating the two. The inhibitory phase of the act may overlap and carry into and through the volitional phase. One comes to understand this in practice, that is, during lessons.

...in the application of my technique the process of inhibition—that is, the act of *refusing to respond* to the primary desire to gain an "end"—becomes the act of *responding* (volitional act) to the conscious reasoned desire to employ the means whereby that "end" may be gained.

(CCCL, p. 118)

[Inhibition] involves a form of non-doing which must not be confused with passivity...

(UCL, p. 107)52

The primary procedure in the technique...is the inhibition...of our habitual reflex activity. To succeed in this means education in the fundamental sense, for it calls for a conscious recognition and understanding of all that is concerned with the formation of habit, and of the means whereby habits can be changed.

By this initial inhibition change becomes possible...

In this whole procedure we see the new principle at work, for if we project those messages which hold in check the familiar habitual reaction, and at the same time project the new messages which give free rein to the motor impulses associated with nervous and muscular energy along unfamiliar lines of communication, we shall be doing what Dewey calls "thinking in activity." As far as we can judge, mankind has not had the experience of thinking in activity where the projection of messages necessary to the employment of the primary control of his use is concerned. In the ordinary way man has just reacted instinctively to any stimulus to activity, whereas in the new plan which I am

suggesting the messages, preventative and otherwise, must be consciously projected in their right sequence throughout the activity.

(UCL, pp. 91-92)

November 7, 1951

Last night I was reading *The Use of the Self*. I read the preface and Dewey's introduction slowly and carefully. Then, not intending to read more as I had some other work to do, I turned to a few pages at random and read there. But then, though I had already read this book once, I became so absorbed in Alexander's account of his experimental work with the aid of mirrors in investigating the use of himself, that I continued to read further. I found myself utterly struck with the idea that Alexander was here trying to get across to his readers, namely, the unreliability of our feelings, of our sensory impression and appreciations. I thought I had already understood this idea, but now, it seemed, I was really grasping and understanding it for the first time.

I lay down on the divan, wanting to think the matter out, to digest carefully this idea I had just swallowed, tasting it fully for the first time. What came to me then, suddenly, was a wonderful sense of being free, of having just been cut loose from something hampering, restricting and burdening. What came to me next was the realization that this sense or experience of freedom is the inevitable consequence of being able to reject feelings or sensory appreciation as unreliable; you could no longer be a slave to them. Being unreliable, they can only mislead, taking you where you don't want to go, not taking you where you want to go, giving you false information about yourself, other persons, the world around you.

I realized that once you refuse to accept your feelings at their face-value, the consequence is, as surely as night follows day, a general *un-doing* of yourself, which is another way of looking at the word "freedom." It must be, indeed, that most of us, most of the time, are dragging ourselves down, burdening ourselves all unknowingly by habitually trying to feel our way, trying to sense our way through life and being hopelessly misled in the process.

The alternative to helpless reliance on our feelings and "instincts" for guidance in behavior is reliance on *conscious* direction and control of use. Failing this alternative, we can scarcely avoid putting undue stress on our sensory mechanisms, imposing such a burden on these that some sort of "breakdown" becomes all but inevitable for so many of us. The "nervous breakdown" may well be a sign of sensory mechanisms strained to the point where even a minimum degree of clarity and order in their functioning is no longer feasible under the old conditions.

This unreliability of our sensory appreciation suggests certain ideas and practices in other fields. In the physical sciences, for example, we have learned not to rely on unaided sensory impressions or observations. We have, instead, developed many kinds of instruments, measuring devices and objective tests in order to construct more accurate statements about objects and events in the world around us. In courts of law it is well known how various may be the interpretations of witnesses to the same accident or event. In the psychiatric and social sciences the degree to which persons often misunderstand or misinterpret the behavior of others is an issue of primary concern. Far from seeing people as they are, we see them as we *make* them to be, thus adding our bit to the "thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to."⁵³ Misinterpretations and misunderstanding seem to be more characteristic than not of our social relations. In the more serious instances of these, psychiatry tells us that the misjudgments may result from something faulty or pathological in the self, that the center to which we refer the impressions we get in our interpersonal relations is not functioning aright, being, perhaps, too heavily freighted with childhood traumas and consequent inflated/deflated self-images, etc.

But now, for over fifty years, Alexander has been saying and *demonstrating* that our feelings (sensory appreciation) are unreliable, why they are unreliable, and what can be done about it. In *The Use of the Self*, p. 16, he writes, "I had proved in my own case and in that of others that instinctive control and direction of use had become so unsatisfactory, and the associated feeling so untrustworthy as a guide that it could lead us to do the very opposite of what we wished to do or thought we were doing." If this is so (and the experiences I've had so far in my lessons have shown me beyond any doubt that it is so), is it not reasonable to suppose that this unreliability or untrustworthiness of feeling as a guide in what we do may be an important factor in misinterpreting the acts and words of others, in misjudging our own motives so far as we make any attempt to understand them and, in fact, in preparing the way for so much of the "mental" illness that, notwithstanding Freud and Jung et al., puzzles us all?

When our sensory appreciation is deceptive, as is the case more or less with everyone to-day, the impressions we get through it are deceptive also. The extent of this deception depends largely upon the extent to which our manner of use has been put wrong and the nature and degree of the faulty guidance of deceptive feeling. When a certain degree of misuse has been reached, the deceptiveness of these impressions reaches a point where they can mislead us into believing that we

ARE DOING SOMETHING WITH SOME PART OF OURSELVES WHEN ACTUALLY WE CAN BE PROVED TO BE DOING SOMETHING QUITE DIFFERENT. This is equally true of things we believe we think, which more often than not are things we feel.

(UCL, pp. 24-25)

Sensory appreciation, from our point of view, has a much wider significance than is generally attributed to it. But it will be sufficient at this point to state that, taken even in the most limited sense, it includes all sensory experiences which are conveyed through the channels of sight, hearing, touch, feeling, equilibrium, movement, etc., and which are responsible for psycho-physical action and reaction throughout the organism.

If we raise an arm, move a leg, or if we make any other movements of the body or limbs, we are guided chiefly by our sensory appreciation or, as most people would put it, by our sense of feeling. This applies to the testing of the texture of a piece of cloth between one's fingers, or the gauging of size, weight, distance, etc.—in fact, to the employment of the "physical" mechanisms in the processes of hearing, seeing, walking, talking, and in all the other activities of life.

(CCCL, p. 21)

November 11, 1951

I still need more confidence and faith. I lack the determination these give. I am aware of my gifts, but they are nothing without enterprise behind them. Otherwise they are mere ornaments, or worse, they are lies—of no value to the world or myself. They must give birth to something worthy. I must see them as means, not ends, and use them as means. For they have, rightly, no existence apart from some product of their own. To make claims for them on any other basis is to be false to the world and myself. I can't allow myself the spurious comfort knowledge of their bare presence affords. I must work hard with unceasing attentiveness. I must guard against fear, inertia and unconsciousness in living. I must fight these with all my strength. I thank God for the knowledge given me by F. M. Alexander. The time will surely come when the world will know what it owes to this extraordinary man.

November 12, 1951

Alexander had seven teeth pulled last week. His secretary called on Friday morning to tell me of this and to cancel my lesson for that afternoon. He said

Mr. Alexander was in fine spirits, but they thought it best that he have a few days' rest from his teaching.

So today when I met him for my lesson, I said I hoped that he was feeling better after the ordeal of last week. He said: "Oh yes, thank you, I feel fine. I have nothing to complain about. People usually expect a man of my age [82] to be quite done in after having seven teeth pulled all at the same time, but it didn't bother me much at all."

Then we got on with the lesson. After only a few minutes I felt the lower part of my torso shift backwards as it had done once before. It happened so suddenly, taking me by surprise, that I laughed, and Alexander asked me why I laughed. I told him, and he said: "It's shifting to where it should be, and it does so precisely for the reason that you were not doing anything."

However, this lesson proved to be a difficult one. And at one point I could see that Alexander was deeply serious with me, concerned about my interference just at the point of rising from the chair. This last minute interference has so far proved a stumbling block, for, in spite of myself, I still keep on trying to get up. My feeling is that Alexander cannot possibly get me up out of the chair, even though I *know* from experience that he can, and so I react by wanting to help him, or so I tell myself. He knows this and tells me I must get rid of this idea. I know this and yet I persist in "trying-to-do." Well, in one way I'm glad of the difficulties, for if I ever do teach this work, I shall know what to expect at the worst from my pupils.

November 14, 1951

This past week I've felt restless. To be on a ship bound for lands and people strange to me—this rather than confine myself to a comfortable flat in London. But then the thought of my study with Alexander chases away the fantasy. Actually, I feel impatient with myself; I want to plunge into something, to commit myself to a line of action. I waste time looking for answers inside my head. I lose the feeling of confidence and grow depressed.

But, my dear boy, get hold of yourself. You are not alone. Remember your thoughts of a few hours ago; how all your friends, family, people you love and have loved, and who love and have loved you—they, all of them, though thousands of miles away, can be brought to your side by a mere thought, a mere memory. Truly, an ocean means nothing, or mighty little, when it comes to this.

But what has this to do with my feeling of confidence, of losing it?

Simply that, in part at least, you lose confidence in yourself when you begin to feel too alone in the world. This feeling oppresses you. You feel juxtaposed to the terrible world. You lose sight of the fact that all the people

who have ever meant anything to you, miles though they may be from you, are always with you. Just summon them, and they will come at once.

Yes, I see what you mean. Of course, that was my thought too a few hours ago.

Indeed, my dear friend, who does not recoil upon himself if he imagines he stands alone in the world? And besides, another thing to change the subject a bit, don't forget you are engaged in learning and applying the Alexander Technique, which means, as you well know, unlearning just about everything you have learned or acquired instinctively and even much you have learned consciously. You must recognize what it means to experience change as you are now beginning to experience it. This means, as Alexander's friend Rowntree expressed it, "passing from the known to the unknown."⁵⁴ This is wonderful and at the same time a little frightening. Keep this thought in mind for you will know more or less what to expect.

But that is true of life also, is it not? Going from a known present to an unknown future?

Of course. And this shows the peculiar relevance and value of Alexander's teaching for the human creature. It equips us to live in a constantly changing world. If man does not change (and does not pass from the known to the unknown) in his manner of reaction, then he will remain forever bound to his familiar, known, instinctive habits of reaction. And this means that man will be outstripped, out-paced by his environment. Indeed, does not the social, economic and technological web of life seem to move and evolve with a momentum of its own while we, man, on the psycho-physical plane, seem to evolve not at all? So we must, as Alexander says, make the transition to life on a more conscious level. It is an evolutionary step we must take, a step we must allow ourselves to take.

November 15, 1951

Good lesson. I feel vastly encouraged. Alexander answered my questions at length. I asked him if the *thinking* that one should do is supposed to be *preventative*. He answered:

"Yes, the thing is, you want to keep the preventative, inhibitory idea in mind as you act. You see, the inhibitory idea becomes the primary means of the volitional act."

Alexander then stepped back a few paces, held out his left hand and extended the index and middle fingers, and said:

"For the sake of argument, say these two fingers represent the old habitual track. You receive a stimulus from within or without the self to do something, for example, sitting back in the chair. And you give consent to this

idea—the message goes down this old track. But now, if you do *not* give consent to the stimulus to 'sit back in the chair,' the message stops here [pointing to his knuckles]. Then after withholding this consent, you prepare a *new* track [Alexander now extended his fourth and little fingers] which represents the new means whereby of allowing the neck to be free, the head to go forward and up, and the back to lengthen and widen [primary control]. This is the main idea, you see. You don't care a jot whether you sit back in the chair or not. *That is not important.* But, you allow your head to go forward and up and move back from the hips just a fraction thus widening the back. What results, finally, is the development of a new track, a new line of communication. This becomes a new habit, one consciously formed and maintained. You are bridging the subconscious and the conscious. The subconscious is the old way of doing, a way of doing you never learned consciously but acquired without any awareness at all. And so, you can see how your great compatriot, Dewey, could say that this is a 'revolution in thought and action.'

...it is essential to understand the difference between the habit that is recognized and understood and the habit that is not. The difference...is that the first can be altered at will and the second cannot. For when real conscious control has been obtained, a "habit" need never become fixed. It is not truly a habit at all, but an order or series of orders given to the subordinate controls of the body, which orders will be carried out until countermanded.

(MSI, p. 52)

"As everyone knows, this is the greatest thing the human creature is capable of, that is, the changing of his own reaction."

...probably the greatest problem that is still unsolved in the education and development of mankind is the problem of the control of human reaction,...

(UCL, p. 95)

No matter in what field of activity it is desired to bring about changes, whether so-called physical, mental, or spiritual, the carrying out of the task demands from us a decision to make that fundamental change in the guidance and control of the working of the mechanisms which is inseparable from change in the manner of use of the self, and unless this is taken into account by those who may be responsible in

the future for ideals and plans for individual and social reform, they are not justified in believing that these will prove more beneficial than those which have been found wanting in the past.

(UCL, p. 98)

To make sure of fundamentals once again, I asked Alexander: "When you tell me to let my head go up and out of your hands, should my response to that be *not to do anything?*"

"That's right. You only *allow* your head to go up, and it *will* go up. I'll give you a written guarantee of that. You take care of this point, and I'll do the rest."

A word of explanation is needed here. Alexander answers this question affirmatively and emphatically so. However, it often happens that the pupil in complying with the "order" not to do anything (inhibitory act) forgets to attend to the all-important matter of directing his use. In a footnote on page 13 of *The Use of the Self*, Alexander says:

When I employ the words "direction" and "directed" with "use" in such phrases as "direction of my use" and "I directed the use," etc., I wish to indicate the process involved in projecting messages from the brain to the mechanisms and in *conducting the energy necessary to the use of these mechanisms.* (My italics)

"I will give you a *right experience*. You have to trust me in this. I cannot give you a wrong experience; it's impossible for me to give you a wrong experience. Think what that means. A golfer friend of mine was telling me that all the professional golfers will give you nineteen wrong experiences out of twenty and yet they can teach you to play a fairly good game of golf. But here, when you come to me, I cannot give you a wrong experience. Think what that means to you, what it will mean to you."

...it is essential to remember that it is both the psycho-physical experiences of the individual in use and functioning, and those that he gains when he is applying himself as an instrument in his activities in the outside world, which combine to make up his experience in living, and it is this sum total of experience which determines the nature and value of his judgment. ... Man still relies upon an undue proportion of limited and deceptive experiences as a basis for judgment in too many spheres of activity and in regard to too many prob-

lems; and this can account in a great measure for the position in which he finds himself to-day... He has been "wishing" for continued progress, development, and freedom of thought and action, "willing" himself to this end, at one time concentrating upon "physical," at another on "mental" means, and also on "spiritual" means.

But as time goes on his attempts to solve his present-day problems by these means have only served to show their limitations, and he is becoming increasingly aware not only of disaster and confusion outside himself, but also of certain growing disabilities *within himself*...

...he will not have brought about any change in that manner of use of himself which has hitherto tended to lower the standard of his general functioning; and the resultant harmful influence of this will become intensified through any special effort he makes, and remain a retarding and degenerating *constant*, associated with conditions of disorder and complication which are bound to lead sooner or later to other harmful habits of use, and gradually to the development of organic trouble and disease.

(LCL, pp. 101-102)

"When you teach this work, the first important thing you have to do is to teach your pupil to allow himself to be taught. Your pupil has to be able to be taught before you can teach him further. Hardly any of my student teachers can get this idea through their heads. There is one student teacher here, for example, who has been here two years and he is just beginning to get hold of this idea. I try to knock it into their heads, like hitting my hand against a stone wall, but it doesn't do any good to hit your hand against a stone wall."

"There is no difference between the greatest philosopher and a plumber's mate when it comes to getting hold of this work, when it's a question of learning to withhold consent and thus not doing a thing in the old way."

"You know, shortly after the war, the Associated Press in your country sent one of their men over here to see me, to interview me for an article on my work. When he came to see me, I told him that he could never expect to write such an article on my work, that it just wasn't possible. I said to him: 'You can talk to me for six months and you still won't be able to write such an article. You ask your employer to let you have a week or two of lessons with me and then see if you do not agree with me.' He was also covering a meeting of some foreign ministers in London. After the meeting, when I saw him, he said: 'When I saw those men seated around the conference table, I thought of you and your work, Mr. Alexander. No sooner would one of them open his mouth to make a statement on the issue being discussed, than two

or three of the others would tighten up, getting set to oppose and argue with him.' Well, this correspondent stayed to have two weeks of lessons with me. He went back to America and never wrote the article."

"When all the business with China was going on and we were worried about Manchuria, I knew our policy would lead us nowhere, that it would end by making us lose Manchuria.⁵⁵ I wrote a six-page letter to one of our ministers concerned with this problem, in which I forecast the disastrous outcome of the policy we were pursuing, and everything I said in that letter came to pass."

November 19, 1951

Yesterday, on a walk in Hyde Park, I sat down on a bench in front of a giant oak tree which in spite of its enormous weight and size seemed to be surging upwards from the earth's surface, its ponderous branches soaring upwards and outwards into the sky, as if possessing some Alexandrian-like anti-gravity mechanism. I realized what a gross mis-conception we have about ourselves. We behave as if our bodies are so much dead-weight—pounds of flesh hanging on our frame of bones. We just can't wait, as we say, to sit down and take the load off our feet. What a spectacularly different and opposite outlook is conveyed to us by the Alexander Technique.

A child grows and grows, measurably grows to the point where measurable growth seems to stop. I wonder if this growing of the child is measurably interfered with by our gross misconception. With no conscious direction of upward expansion to stimulate the anti-gravity mechanisms, sheer physical growth, on the one hand, and the downward pull and collapsing heaviness of the body, on the other hand, may become warring factions subjecting the child to a variety of debilitating muscular twists and pulls. Alexander's teaching ensures that none of this happens and that the tendency towards growth and expansion of the self will continue into and throughout adult life.

November 21, 1951

If what feels most right and comfortable is more than likely to be wrong—as Alexander maintains and as my own experience so far has shown me—then it might prove useful and instructive to deliberately set out to do something in a way that does not feel right and comfortable but rather feels wrong.

The harder one tries to perform a given act, the more certain he is to fail if his performance is characterized by misuse and misdirection of the self. Why is this? Because the harder one tries the more pronounced or exaggerated becomes the misuse and misdirection. Furthermore, the very idea of trying to do something suggests a call for greater effort and energy than nor-

inally required to do the thing in question. In other words, the proper "means-whereby" of accomplishment is being ignored. Alexander calls this "end-gaining." In such a case, the best advice is to stop trying-to-do and then to think out the proper means-whereby of preventing misuse of the self, and, finally, the proper means-whereby of performing the given act.

If a person wants to appraise his own conduct in order to find out where it is taking him, he should stop and examine his present activities and then imaginatively project them into the future to see where they lead. For, as so often happens, our present activities may turn out to have no relation whatever to the ends we have in view.

November 22, 1951

Concerning "bad" habits. In *The Use of the Self*, Alexander mentions the habit of smoking and the kind of usual end-gaining efforts to stop. He says everyone knows that each cigarette smoked is a stimulus to smoke another. Therefore, each time we can withhold consent to light a cigarette, we break a link in the chain that binds us. This chain-like character applies to many of our habits, both good and bad. To first recognize the chain is a step toward breaking links in it. For example, every time we put off doing a thing we know we should do, we lay the groundwork for putting it off again. Each drink we take is the stimulus to take the next one. Each strain on the WC is a stimulus to strain again.

Straining on the WC is a wonderful example of end-gaining. I am convinced that it has an effect opposed to the one desired, possibly blocking the rhythmic working of the large intestine or colon. My problem in this matter is rather acute. My doctor in Ridgefield, Connecticut, said I had a "spastic colon." I think he is right. I wonder if it is a result of bad use of myself in the past or if it is a "natural" defect for which I am not responsible. (I was writing this in bed, in the morning, and this writing about it sent me running to the WC where I again had a large BM⁵⁶ with spasms; and the accompanying succession of cramps.) Actually a definite change in my bowel habits has been taking place over the past two to three weeks. During this period every BM, with one or two exceptions, has been accompanied or rather accomplished by spasms or cramps. The spasms are in every way similar to vomiting spasms. This has been going on daily—though occasionally I skip a day following a particularly violent discharge. The result, of course, has been that—for what seems to be the first time in my life—I have been cleared out for many days running. I no longer accumulate, over a period of five to ten days, a vast mass of waste material.

November 24, 1951

At the end of today's lesson Alexander said this was my "best lesson" so far. At the start of it he had said:

"You know, I do envy your back, but for God's sake use it. I'll tell you a little story about this 'For God's sake use it.' Years ago, I knew a chap, Clarence Holt was his name, a director of plays. He was an Irishman and wonderful old fellow. He always picked his casts for specific qualities they had. During one of his rehearsals he was trying to exhort a woman to play her part with more gusto. He said to her: 'Madam, you must get emotion into this part, please be emotional.' She tried again, but he was still dissatisfied. He said again, 'Madam, please, we need your emotions in this part.' He pleaded and pleaded. She tried again. Finally he shouted at her: 'Madam. You have the finest pair of breasts I've ever seen. For Christ's sake, HEAVE 'EM!' So whenever I see someone with an asset like your back, and I want to plead with him to take advantage of it, I think of old Holt saying to that actress, 'For Christ's sake, Heave 'em!' Yes, that fellow would say anything."

"You have come to a point in your lessons where you have to have faith in the principles of the work and faith in me. I can feel you hesitate. You doubt that the thing will work. But yet you *know* that it does work. Put your faith in it and don't hesitate. We can never expect to do a thing if we begin by doubting that we can do it, isn't that so? And it doesn't matter at this stage whether or not you are doing it right."

"Six or seven places in my books I have made a remark which no one ever seems to remember, and that is that *ends come of themselves*. When you sit down you are in too much of a hurry to do so. You drive right for the end. Don't think about the end! Don't think about sitting down! What you do want to do, however, is to think of the *means-whereby*, of the means that are right for you to attain the end. The ends come of themselves. They cannot help but come of themselves."

...man tends to become more and more a confirmed end-gainer, one who too often insists on gaining his end by any means, even at the risk of disaster, rather than take time to consider means whereby the end can be gained so as to ensure best possible result.

(UCL, pp. 95-96)

Only time and experience in the working out of the technique will convince him [the pupil] that, where the "means-whereby" are right for the purpose, desired ends will come. They are inevitable. Why then be concerned as to the manner or speed of their coming? We

should reserve all thought, energy, and concern for the means whereby we may command the manner of their coming out.

(UCL, p. 85)

At one point during the lesson while I was "sitting" in the chair, Alexander guided me so that I was poised far forward in the chair. Then he asked me: "How does that feel to you? Does it feel strange?" After a moment's thought, I answered: "I'm really not sure how it feels." Then he gently pushed my head backwards a little, and, at that moment, I felt my back arch inwards. I immediately exclaimed: "Ah, that feels more natural." To which Alexander responded: "But you see, my boy, that is precisely what you don't want to do to yourself. The way that now feels natural to you is the wrong way."

...in our conception of *how* to employ the different parts of our mechanisms, we are guided almost entirely by a sense of feeling which is more or less unreliable. We get into the habit of performing a certain act in a certain way, and we experience a certain feeling in connexion with it which we recognize as "right." *The act and the particular feeling associated with it become one in our recognition.* If anything should cause us to change our conception, however, in regard to the manner of performing the act, and if we adopt a new method in accordance with this changed conception, we shall experience *a new feeling* in performing the act which we do not recognize as "right." We then realize that what we have hitherto recognized as "right" is wrong.

(CCCL, pp. 82-83)

"That is what so many people are doing to themselves all of the time. [Alexander, demonstrating, clenched his hands and pressed the knuckles of both hands against each other, showing me how the vertebrae of the spine crush into each other when the back is arched unduly inwards rather than lengthening and widening.] If people would only stop doing *that* to themselves they would not be likely to get things like sciatica or coronary thrombosis."

...I look to that wonderful instrument, the human body, for the true solution of our difficulty, an instrument so inimitably adaptable, so full of marvellous potentialities of resistance and recuperation, that it is able, when properly used, to overcome all the forces of disease which may be arrayed against it.

(MSI, p. xvi)

Alexander's favorite quotation:

"What a piece of work is man: how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god!" (*Hamlet*)⁵⁷

November 26, 1951

A stumbling block in my case to concerted activity, to persistence in the doing of what I want to do, is my tendency to see the activity itself as an end and not as a means to something else. This is end-gaining, of course, in a different form, the emphasis lying on the thought or plan of action rather than action itself.

The thought of oneself in one's own little room is stultifying. One needs to keep in mind one's participation in the surrounding life, in the lives of others, in the world of things and happenings.

I am occupied, increasingly of late, though it seems to have been going on for as long as I can remember, with the task of getting to the bottom of myself. At the moment I look upon myself as a mystery and I need to unravel it. For the last day or so I've had the uncanny feeling that the key, if there is one, is just now within my grasp. I feel as if I'm blind and feeling around with my hands. In any case, I will have to wait.

Anthony Eden said to the U. N. General Assembly: "We must deal with small definite problems" in order to make the kind of progress we desire to make. And he said we must also call a halt to futile arguments and dissensions. I thought this a wise speech.⁵⁸

But to come back to myself, which would seem to be my *only* interest these days, I must continually remind myself of the same necessity, to deal with the small, definite and immediate problems and not to plunge over the horizon with ideas and plans only possible over the long run and then only after many small definite steps have been taken. Yes, I have plenty to do right here, in my own backyard.

November 27, 1951

Why should I write, anyway? Why do I sometimes feel so much that I want to write, feel that I can write, once I sit down to it? And then why does it happen that I cannot sustain the impulse? This has happened in the past. It suddenly seems strange that I can't answer these questions. Is there something wrong in my *asking* them? Do I unwittingly, or unconsciously, try to defeat myself by asking them? If I'm not sure of my own motives, desires, impulses to action, does this perhaps signify a distrust of them? Alexander said to me last time: "You have reached a point where what you need now is

faith in the work, faith in me." Maybe this is a clue. Maybe what I really need is faith in myself. It might be that my evaluation of my own past behavior is such that I defeat myself in the present. At another time, Alexander had said: "To teach this work, you have to first teach the pupil to allow himself to be taught." Seemingly, there's a connection between these two remarks. I should say to myself: Don't allow any self-evaluation of past failures and false starts to stop you from going ahead now, and in the future! For indeed, are you not changing now? Trust in these changes. Recognize that any new faith you get is itself a change!

December 8, 1951

This week I have devoted at least 85% of my waking time to the Alexander Technique, practising it and just plain thinking about it. Result: good lessons and making progress. And also, every day, reading chapters in *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual*. Yesterday, in my lesson, I realized that I haven't really been carrying out the act of inhibiting—perhaps the most important part of the whole business. I think this is why I've felt slightly stalemated and discouraged the past few weeks. Either you make the decision to inhibit, or you may as well give up all thought of changing from a bad to a good use of yourself. I see this clearly now. One has to discover and rediscover that improved use follows inhibition with mathematical precision.

In speaking of the education of the subconsciousness below the reasoning plane, Alexander writes (*Man's Supreme Inheritance*, p. 20): "The important point is the fact that the phase of being with which we are dealing becomes, as we progress through life, a composite of animal instincts and habits acquired below the plane of reason either by repetition or suggestion." Indeed, how many of the things I have done so far in life have been done as the result of "habits acquired... either by repetition or suggestion"! I was reading over my "thesis" last night, for the first time in four months, and I truly got a shock: what a mess of words, I thought, meaning what?

Certainly one of the main obstacles to improving the practice of inhibition is the hurry with which we perform so many acts in our daily life. We could help ourselves counteract this by intentionally slowing down our movements. I've found that it is easier to inhibit when moving about in slow-motion.

January 1, 1952

I begin the new year reading Norbert Wiener's *The Human Use of Human Beings*, and I am struck by the relevance of Cybernetics to the Alexander

Technique.⁵⁹ I believe they may both have something of importance to say to each other, though I see this "something" only vaguely at the moment. Cybernetics also points up the value of Korzybski's General Semantics as the science of sending and receiving unambiguous information.

Here is an interesting passage from *The Journal of Eugène Delacroix*:⁶⁰ "We should do everything calmly and only react emotionally to great works of art or noble deeds. Work quietly and without hurrying. As soon as you begin to sweat and get excited, be careful. Slack painting is the painting of a slacker." (p. 19, Phaidon Press, 1951)

January 2, 1952

First lesson of the new year and an excellent one. I think the interval of two weeks without lessons was a time for assimilation and consolidation of ground covered and preparation for the new.

During this lesson I felt as if there were a big mainspring in my back and hips. Alexander barely touched me with a finger and I seemed to spring forward and up!

But I still try to get up! However, I think I've reached a point where success in this respect is just around the corner. I do think I am on the point of making new progress. I'm ready to make a jump ahead. I am confident of this.

At one point in the lesson, I said to Alexander: "I couldn't help but feel that it was impossible for me to get up from that position." Alexander's reply struck home:

"Ah, my boy, you see you give yourself away completely with that remark. You see, you *will* try to get up! You just will not leave it all to me. Don't care if you don't get up. It's not your business whether you get up or not. I sometimes, as a joke, tell my pupils that they insult me when they persist in trying to help me get them up [out of the chair]. Getting you up is my job. All I want you to do is to pay attention to your neck and head, so that your neck is free and your head will go forward and up. Now, to stand up, let your head go forward and up. Don't care a jot whether you get up or not, that's my business. Now, head forward and up! That's it. Now, come back to my arm, come back to my arm..."

Of this and other phrases used by the teacher, Alexander makes the following comments in Chapter IV, Part II, of *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual*, followed by explanations of each of the phrases ordinarily used in teaching:

...it is necessary to use certain phrases employed in the teaching

technique, phrases which I consider call for comment, seeing that they do not always adequately express my meaning and that, furthermore, they cannot be defended as being demonstrably accurate... but with a teacher present to demonstrate in person what he means by them, they serve their purpose. (p. 108)

Of the phrase "Head Forward and Up," Alexander says:

This is one of the most inadequate and often confusing phrases used as a means of conveying our ideas in words, and it is a dangerous instruction to give to any pupil, unless the teacher first demonstrates his meaning by giving to the pupil, *by means of manipulation*, the exact experiences involved. (p. 109)

The phrase "come back to my arm" reminds the pupil not to go forward in the chair but to allow his back to go back and widen as it lengthens.

Of the phrase "Widen the back," Alexander writes:

This instruction rivals the last one [Head Forward and Up] in its shortcomings, when considered as a phrase for the conveyance of an idea which we expect a pupil to construe correctly, unless it is given by a teacher who is capable of demonstrating what he means by readjusting the pupil's organism so that the conditions desired may be brought about.

"What really occurs is that there is brought about a very marked change in the position of the bony structures of the thorax—particularly noticeable if a posterior view is taken—also a permanent enlargement of the thoracic cavity, with a striking increase in thoracic mobility and the minimum tension of the whole of the mechanisms involved. (p. 109)

January 6, 1952

I often worry about doing a thing *before* I do it, with the result that I fail to act. I must call a HALT to this timid worrying! I know full well that only in action, in doing and in working, am I happy. My stopping to worry and consider and consider is perverse. A result of fear. Have faith, and act! Though not unconsciously. An unconscious plunge into action is as much a result of fear as fearing to plunge. By all means, be conscious of taking the plunge. Then you can be confident of the outcome.

Life is never a matter of shrinking! Life is a matter of *expanding*, of embracing. Life is growth, everywhere. To live is to grow and to grow with increasing awareness of growing. Don't be afraid of a new idea. To contract, to shrink, to establish and then cease establishing, is tantamount to dying. What man needs is a change in his direction. Alexander's work is a means for bringing about this change in direction.

January 7, 1952

Had a good lesson with Alexander this afternoon. More and more I have the sensory experience of going "forward and up."

January 10, 1952

As I left Ashley Place today, Alexander said: "One of your best lessons." I, on the other hand, had thought to myself all through the lesson: This is one of my worst lessons—I'm doing so badly!

At one point, Alexander said: "You don't think enough. That's what worries me."

"What the world has to see, and what it eventually will see, is the *effect of the manner of use upon function*."

It has not been realized that the influence of the manner of use is a constant one upon the general functioning of the organism in every reaction and during every moment of life, and that this influence can be a harmful or a beneficial one. It is an influence for ill or an influence for good in accordance with the nature of the manner of use of the self in living, and from this there is not any escape. Hence this influence can be said to be a *universal constant in a technique for living*.

(UCL, p. xxxvi)

From my long experience I can now assert with confidence that the underlying cause of our personal and social difficulties will persist until we adopt "means-whereby" which will not only *prevent* the children of our time and of the future from developing a manner of using themselves that is a constant influence for ill in everything they do, but, in those cases where harmful conditions are already present, will restore a manner of use which will be a constant influence for good. This remains true no matter what other means for alleviating them are adopted.

(UCL, pp. 9-10)

Today I took my friend Mr. J. for an interview with Alexander. I had told the latter previously of J.'s position with the Outward Bound Trust and described its work, after which Alexander replied:

"I'm in hearty agreement with the out-of-doors, the fresh air side of it, but not with the strenuous exercises, and so forth, for one month. You take these boys out of the city for one month and subject them to thirty days of vigorous exercise, and they will go back to the city worse off than they were in the beginning. Why give them a training they don't need and will never use again? Boys should be educated for what they are going to do, for the kind of life they will eventually live."

But of what avail are good hygienic conditions, an outdoor life, a greatly improved environment, "free activities," and "physical exercises," whilst the child that is to be given an "all-round development" under these conditions is actually allowed to use himself during his activities in ways which interfere to such an extent with the psycho-mechanics of his respiratory processes that these are working nearer to their minimum than to their maximum capacity, and this in spite of the fact that his teachers would unanimously agree that the proper working of these processes is the most vital element in the child's development?

The almost universal call for physical drill, or physical exercises, in schools, for training in posture, breathing exercises, etc., coming from parents, teachers, and all concerned, is an admission that there is a great need in this direction, but, unfortunately, these methods will not give the necessary help. The harmful effects of the child's psycho-physical experiences, gained whilst at study, cannot be remedied by the performance of the movements involved in any forms of exercises, drill, posture, callisthenics, etc., for the defects resulting from these daily psycho-physical experiences are the manifestations of a badly adjusted and imperfectly co-ordinated machine, guided and controlled by a delusive sensory appreciation, and therefore functioning much nearer to its minimum than to its maximum capabilities.

The problem is further complicated in that there has been and still is a continual increase in the educational demands which are being made upon the child, unavoidably, it is supposed, in the present stage of civilization. For the increase in the degree of mal-co-ordination present in the child continues in the same ratio as the difficulties to be overcome in any attempt to eradicate defects, whilst at the same time the degree of difficulty which the child will encounter in connexion

with its lessons or other activities will be in accord with the degree of imperfect general functioning. This again means that the child, to ensure success, must of necessity devote more and more time to these subjects, with the result that increasing demands are being made upon him, involving longer hours of work and increased effort, and the increasing complications these imply. How can the psycho-physical mechanisms of the children meet these demands satisfactorily, when they are functioning much nearer to their minimum than to their maximum possibilities? And what is to happen if the educational demands continue to increase, whilst the psycho-physical possibilities of the children continue to decrease, as they surely will, unless the defects which make for badly co-ordinated use of the psycho-physical self are eradicated, and instead there is set in motion a process of genuine development on a plane of conscious control in the use of the organism?

(CCCL, pp. 70-72)

I said that my friend has his heart and soul in his work, that he is a firm believer in rigorous exercise, but that he is one of the most tied-up, rigid persons I know. Alexander said:

"Ah, yes, that's the way it goes. A man should never teach others unless he has lived and experienced what he teaches."

"You always get people who immediately want to teach. I ask them: 'Why? Why do you want to teach?' The trouble is that they want to try to change or help others without themselves being changed or helped in this way."

Most children at school manifest defects in the use of themselves in the ordinary acts of life—in a large number of cases, very serious defects—and all kinds of drills and remedial exercises are employed in the attempt to eradicate these defects. Yet, except in very rare instances, the teachers employed in these remedial and other spheres in our schools are too often themselves beset with exaggerated forms of the same or other defects or peculiarities. If teachers are worthy of the name, it is certain that their pupils will be influenced by them in more ways than one, and that most pupils will tend subconsciously to imitate them. ... A realization of the serious consequences involved in the foregoing will bring conviction that all teachers who manifest defects and peculiarities which are the result of their own unreliable sensory appreciation and unsatisfactory use of their psycho-physical organism are a bad example—indeed a positive danger—to their pu-

pils, and that the possibility of satisfactory psycho-physical results accruing to both pupil and teacher is seriously minimized by this impeding factor—viz., the acquisition of defects and peculiarities by imitation.

(CCCL, pp. 158-159)

January 12, 1952

I read Time magazine this afternoon (Saturday), then went to the 5:30 movie at the Classic on King's Road to see *Edward and Caroline*⁶¹ for the second time. There was also a short film on *Rubens* that I particularly desired to see.

Returned hastily to flat to hear a BBC performance of Schoenberg's *Gurrelieder*⁶²—it's been all of seven or eight years since I heard it last, from my own recording of it, the records I lent to a girl friend to keep for me while I was in the Navy, and I never got them back from her. I listened absorbed and moved to tears at the passages that I used to play again and again while writing poems.

I bought the Phaidon edition of *The Journal of Eugène Delacroix* and began reading it this evening. It has over 80 plates. It promises to be absorbing reading.

Tonight I again have a feeling of certainty about myself and my desire to paint, to learn how to draw and to paint. Yes, I am confident that I can soon learn to paint competently if only I can succeed in harnessing my moods—I realize that every mood, every state of mind, feeling, etc., that tries to inform me of futility, insuperable obstacles, inability to persevere, and so on, endlessly, is tantamount to a withdrawal from life. It amounts, ultimately, to saying: "Well boys, even though we have lived hardly more than three decades, it's time to throw in the towel. There's no point in going on, because we won't get anywhere anyway." How utterly stupid this attitude is—as if life is not meant to be lived *at this moment*! Forget about 10, 20 or 30 years from now—that day may never come, so why throw today away because you fear an uncertain day far ahead in the uncertain future? That isn't even sensible! Furthermore, it's just one more classic example of what Alexander means by end-gaining!

I'm also beginning to realize much more fully another difficulty in my outlook towards work and life: it is this—I tend to resist doing the necessary work, the practice and training required of any profession. I actually seem to think, in effect anyway, that I don't need to go through all of that. My dreams skip over it all, to place me upon the throne at the end! Well—this is, again, end-gaining. I suspect this is a disease peculiar to our time. We all are in too much haste to be Somebody. Nothing is intrinsically wrong with

wanting to be Somebody—nothing is more human in a human society! But it's wrong when you act as though "dreaming will make it so."

Of late I have become convinced of one thing: that *achievement* and *confidence* are two sides of the same coin. Remember Alexander's remark: "Life is the development of conscious control and confidence!" And I came across this sentence by Delacroix: "...nothing is so rare as the confidence which alone can beget great masterpieces." Confidence means really a readiness to live literally rather than to die figuratively.

January 14, 1952

A wonderful, most wonderful lesson. As I was taking leave of Alexander, he said: "That was very good today. You are coming along all right now."

Nevertheless, all was not clear sailing. So often a "good" or "wonderful" lesson means the contrary of being free and easy and simple as the following remarks of Alexander during this particular lesson will show:

"There, you see! You will try to go forward, in spite of all I say! You will try to go forward! But THAT'S YOU! YOU DON'T STOP! You are too anxious to do something! That's the trouble with us all; somebody tells us to do something and we act at once! We are all trained that way. The father tells his son to do something, and the boy jumps! It happens like lightning, that reaction to a command or impulse. What we have to learn to do is to inhibit this first immediate reaction. As soon as you are able to do that, you are automatically at liberty to do something else, to adopt, that is, some other course of action."

I have already pointed out that children from the first moment of school life onwards manifest a lack of inhibitory development, and the fact that in most cases they learn to obey orders at once, without stopping to consider the "why and the wherefore," is a contributing factor to this harmful condition.

(CCCL, p. 102)

"You see, it doesn't matter, it does not make any difference whether you go forward, go back, stand up, or not. *Let me take care of that!* It makes no difference here whether you are right or wrong. You have only one thing to do: to see that you do not tense your neck, to allow your head to go forward and up, thereby obtaining a widening of the back, an expanding of the chest, you can never burst a blood vessel or contract coronary thrombosis—so many thousands of people in Britain die every year from that one disease alone, and I imagine it is the same in your country."

My experience in all these cases has brought home to me the close relationship which exists between the manner of use of the mechanisms and the standard of functioning, for where I have found unsatisfactory use of the mechanisms, the functional trouble associated with it has included interference with the respiratory and circulatory systems, dropping of the abdominal viscera, sluggishness of various organs, together with undue and perverted pressures, contractions, and rigidities throughout the organism, all of which tend to lower the standard of resistance to disease.

(UoS, p. 61)

"There, you see—if I do your thinking [inhibiting] for you, then you work beautifully."

"It is good to not try and get a thing right the first time. Sometimes, I actually start out by doing what I know to be a wrong way of doing and then, in the process, I set it right..."

...under orthodox teaching methods, the teacher expects his pupil to try to be "right" from the very start in carrying out whatever he is asked to do, and the pupil also believes in this idea and acts accordingly. In expecting this of his pupil, the teacher is not only asking him to overcome at one stroke the influence of long-established habits of use, but also to accomplish this feat while being guided by the unreliable feeling which had led him into his wrongness.

(UCL, pp. 80-81)

This last remark made me think of learning to draw. When the student first begins drawing from the model, he unfailingly tries to get his drawing right, from the very first touch of his pencil to the paper, with the result that he stiffens and torments his line. I have found in my own drawing these last few days that it helps not to care whether I get it right—or not.

I shall always remember the following remark, the way he said it: "This work is so simple, you know. The trouble is, it's too simple."

Indeed, we might say that a dangerous stage of perversion and delusion has already been reached, when the attempts at solution of all the problems of life seem to call for complexity rather than simplicity in procedure. We even reach a stage when the most simple "means-whereby" in accomplishment become the most difficult. A very interesting instance in this connection occurred in my teaching

experience. A well-known man of scientific attainments had great difficulty for some days with a simple, practical problem of psycho-mechanics concerned with his re-education. When he came to his lesson one morning he said: "I know now what is the matter with us all. This work of yours is too simple for us!"

(CCCL, p. 7)

Apocryphal that, Alexander related how a well-known professional man had said to him: "You know, we have all these things like psychoanalysis, but you have the answer right here, in all its simplicity."

The method of psychoanalysis, therefore, like other methods of treatment on a subconscious basis, is an instance of an "end-gaining" attempt to effect the "cure" of a specific trouble by specific means, without consideration being given to the necessity of restoring a satisfactory standard of general psycho-physical functioning and of sensory appreciation.

(CCCL, p. 58)

The following quoted paragraphs are from a letter written by John Dewey, dated May 22, 1918, to an unidentified critic of Alexander. The contents of this letter were made available to Eric D. McCormack, whose Ph.D. dissertation, "Frederick Matthias Alexander and John Dewey: A Neglected Influence," is my source for the paragraphs.⁶³ According to Mr. McCormack, this letter is "in the files of the Alexander Foundation (London),⁶⁴ but the name of the addressee has been withheld."

All of the 'psychic' complexes have their basis in organic dis-co-ordinations and tensions, with compensatory flabbinesses, and his technique is a technique for resolving and unravelling these, reducing the present technique of the psychoanalyst to an incidental accompaniment, and cutting out the elaborate ritualistic mummeries with which the present psychoanalysts have been obliged to surround their method. In addition, Mr. Alexander's technique unravels the kinks and complexes by a process of positive replacement in which sound co-ordinations are built up with their corresponding alterations in habitual sensory and emotional data, while at the best the psychoanalysts merely untie a knot and leave the organic causes which produced it untouched.

Before I had lessons myself, although I had talked with him

[Alexander], read his earlier book, and members of my family had had many lessons, I argued against what seemed to me prejudice on his part against psychoanalysis, on the ground that in principle his method was similar. Only after I had had experimental demonstration did I see how completely right he was in saying that their method was negative, and left the patient subject to the same thing in some other form. . . . I have written at some length, although I realize that to you this is all probably a matter of argument and opinion, while with Mr. Alexander and with those who have had the good fortune to get inside his principle or method it is a matter of sheer fact; he is the only person I have ever known, or known of, who knows what he is talking about in the sense that a competent engineer knows when he is talking about his speciality. (From a letter by John Dewey)

Before I started Alexander lessons with the Barts in April of 1950, I had made brief stabs at drawing and painting, such as doing portrait sketches in charcoal of most of our friends who spent weekends with us in South Salem. Whether this desire to draw and paint was because of a history of such in my family—my grandmother, mother, sister and brother painted more or less seriously from time to time—or because my Jungian analyst, Dr. Abel, encouraged me to do so, I don't know. What I do know is that my Alexander work opened me up to the possibility of doing serious work in this field.

Such were my sporadic efforts in drawing and painting up until the time I started work at the Heatherley School of Art in London in January of 1952. When I entered the teachers training course I stopped going to Heatherley but nevertheless vigorously pursued what by that time I regarded as a serious avocation on my own. At some point in 1954 I started working in clay. The first thing I did was a bust of Alexander from photographs. It turned out rather well even though firing in the kiln caused many small cracks on the surface, giving it an interesting texture. I painted it with acrylic white, glazing the red-brick color of the fired clay, the terra cotta. I never showed it to Alexander, nor, for that matter, this diary of my lessons with him. I regret both omissions; it would have been good to have his comments.

January 17, 1952

I stopped in a pub and had three beers. Standing at the bar, I experimented with "balancing" myself, strongly emphasizing the direction to my head. What I experienced was a *pull* forward and up that seemed to originate from

the direction of the head itself. The sensation was as if my head was pulling me up.

January 21, 1952

Yesterday, January 20th, was Alexander's eighty-third birthday. Today's lesson started out badly (according to my own estimation) and ended well. Alexander said he disliked having to use the word "try." I must learn to inhibit!

"You convert this step of inhibition into the primary activity of freeing the neck, allowing the head to go forward and up, lengthening and widening the back, expanding the chest, and so on."

During this lesson I noticed a very sudden release and expansion in my breathing.

Part of my difficulty is that *I am always trying to be right!* I must stop this trying to be right, for immediately I try to be right, then, willy-nilly, I do things wrong, i.e., in the old way that feels right. I must cease this trying to be right! Inhibit this tendency and I shall then be free to project the guiding orders, that is, to direct my neck to be free, my head to go forward and up, etc. Moreover, if I can inhibit this tendency, which is so overwhelming, to try and be right, I can then allow *nature* to assert itself!

January 23, 1952

This morning I got up at 5:30 to write down a vivid dream (in other journal). Did drawing at Heatherley from twelve to six o'clock. I'm making progress I think. The past two days I've felt a little depressed. I must not be faint-hearted! In the past I've given in far too easily to feelings of discouragement, mainly of self-doubts. I must realize that all or most men have such doubts—yet they persist, and go on with their work. I must think less of the future which tells me nothing, and only depresses me—and make the most of the present. After all, I am living now. Otherwise, the whole of a man's life is one long preparation for some consummation that may never come. Life is meant to be lived *now*. *Do now* what you *plan* to do.

January 27, 1952

The last two days this week at Heatherley, I've used Conté crayon, rather than pencil, in my drawing—F. Wynne Thomas came around for the first time on Friday. He looked at my day's work in drawings, and praised them. He explained carefully the interior shadow of volumes, using illustration of a billiard ball. I found this helpful and enlightening. He said that you have to be careful with Conté crayon because "your drawing can look better than it

really is." I had recognized this, and emphatically agreed with him. He said you can get nice results with it. He looked at one of my drawings, and said I had gotten a nice quality in the shading. Later he brought me an old drawing of Frederick Whiting's to show me, illustrating what he had said about the billiard ball.

January 28, 1952

Got to Heatherley's by 10:00 and did two drawings, about half an hour for each—the model being a red-haired student, very round face, strong body, wearing a black dress and green stockings, with a scotch plaid kerchief wound about her neck, and fixed in front with a silver clasp. She was interesting, and I drew her with enthusiasm in Conté crayon, being very free. MacNab passed by, stopped by to look, but offered no criticism.

January 31, 1952

I had a rather amusing dream last night, so today I related it to Alexander:

"I was giving a lecture on the Alexander Technique to a group of students back in my old prep school. During the lecture I drew on the blackboard a diagram of the lungs. The figure represented the lungs as two horizontal fat sausages. I said to the students: 'Believe it or not, that sausage-shaped figure represents the lungs.' Then I drew a profile of the skull and the spinal column. But in order to represent the latter it was necessary for me to trace the chalk off the blackboard, down the wall, and all the way down to the floor, thereby indicating the length or lengthening of the back. The long horizontal sausage-like lungs were meant to indicate the width or widening of the back."

Alexander laughed and said: "That shows you are really absorbing what I teach you."

Then I told Alexander how, so often, when I awake in the morning, my neck feels as though I had been tensing it to the utmost all through the night. He said:

"Yes, people ordinarily are never aware of what they do to themselves in their sleep. As someone said to me once, 'People die in their sleep.' With myself, it is impossible for me to do such things to myself even during sleep. For as soon as I do something like that, it hits me like a bolt of lightning—I immediately become aware of it. When you lie down to sleep, you ought not to lose the awareness you have in your waking hours. Before dropping off, give yourself the orders for the head to go forward and up, the back to lengthen and widen, and so on."

So far as investigation has been possible, it has been found that people often tend to exaggerate in sleep the harmful manner of use they employ during their waking hours. It is not generally appreciated that although the need of activating the mechanisms responsible for the process of living may perhaps not be so great during sleep as during the waking hours (because of the generally lowered tone and tempo of the functions), it is nevertheless present, and may be interfered with by the same harmful habits of use as prevail in wakeful activity.

(UCL, p. 1, footnote 1)

At one point in this lesson Alexander gave an unusually firm forward-and-up direction to my head with his hands. The consequence, for me, was an unusually acute awareness of my head going forward and up out of his hands, of lengthening. Alexander said:

"There, you felt that? If I had done that in the beginning of our lessons, you would have *pulled down* on me."

I said to Alexander: "I was realizing the other day that the head, when free to do so, actually exerts a pull on the rest of the body, a pull upwards. For it seemed to me that I experienced such a pull very strongly a few evenings ago as I stood at a bar drinking a glass of beer and projecting the orders." He answered:

"Yes, indeed. That is just what the head does do. Soon you will experience this pull constantly. You will have it all of the time, and you will feel strange without it! When you get that, you are on the road to Tipperary."

This lesson was a very good one, and, in a way, I regard it as a milestone in my progress. I had gone into this lesson, on the way to Ashley Place, aware of various tensions and un-doing them. During the week I had become aware in particular of a more or less habitual tensing of stomach muscles, and I found this to be definitely associated with the "pulling-in" of my lower back. For stopping this tension not only had the effect to some extent of allowing the lower back to "shift" backwards, but also seemed to increase the freedom in breathing. However, all this was secondary to the awareness of what I was doing with my head and neck.

February 1, 1952

Got back to flat and resumed working on a landscape, a composition subject for next week. Started it last night and made a horrible mess. So I got depressed, doubting my ability, distrusting myself, once again. Again, the faint heart! First sign of messing things, I weaken and cringe! I must have a remarkably high idea of my ability if, when I fail to paint a masterpiece at the

The Expanding Self

first stroke of my brush, I begin to doubt myself. Who am I, that I should not botch things and make a mess? Here I am, trying to paint pictures, already! I haven't yet learned how to handle paint properly. The drawing goes so well I doubtless expect my working with paint to be equally happy. Foolish fellow!

As Alexander says to me, I *will* try to be right! I shall and must rid myself of this fool's habit. Even MacNab says to his students, "Don't try to get the thing right!" And I heard Thomas tell a student, "We're not here to paint pictures, but to learn how to paint."

February 4, 1952

Another excellent lesson. I now think I am securing a definite grasp of the work. However, there is one thing that continues at this stage to be the crucial obstacle: When Alexander tells me not to try and stand up, nor to even think about standing up, I nod in agreement, and I resolve not to do anything in the way of standing up. But, when the crucial moment (my use of the word "crucial" is significant!) comes, I *do* try to stand up! I try to help Alexander as he takes me out of the chair, and this in spite of all he has said and all my intentions *not* to do so!

Thinking about this now, I suspect that part of my difficulty is this: I am too anxious to succeed in this work. I insist upon thinking it important that I get up out of the chair!

Another incentive to end-gaining on the pupil's part is his desire to gain in a given time the maximum benefit from his lessons irrespective of the conditions to be changed. Unfortunately for him, in view of the nature of his educational training, this very commendable desire causes him to make a special will-to-do effort in his desire at all costs to be "right." But as his "right" is wrong, this merely means a stronger effort in the wrong direction and an exaggeration of his habitual way of "doing" the very things he must get rid of, if he is to gain the improvement he desires.

(UCL, p. 85)

Now, let's see: if I *don't* get out of the chair—that is, if Alexander is *unable* to take me up out of the chair, this means that I am pulling down (pulling backwards and downwards), i.e., actively interfering with the primary control of use, tensing my neck, not allowing my head to go forward and up, and, in fact, *shortening rather than lengthening!* Here is the point: this *interference* means that, in spite of what I think or believe I am *not* doing, I am actually

Illustrations



Tom Mott, Bill (P. E.) Williams and Goddard Binkley in St. James Park, London, 1953. (Photo by Anthony Spawforth).



Goddard Binkley in 1986, outside Paris



F. M. Alexander, bust by Goddard Binkley, 1953

trying to get up, and this trying-to-get-up actually *prevents* me from getting up! It follows, even logically, that if I *do not try* to get up, I *will* get up. Conclusion: *Trying-to-do interferes with doing.*

...all "trying" starts from some personal conviction that in some way we shall be able to do what we are trying to do, and this conviction, like conviction on any other point, is made possible only by virtue of impressions received through the agency of our sensory processes. ...if the functioning of our sensory make-up is unsatisfactory, our register of what is happening in response to the stimulus to "try" is likely to be deceptive, so that the reaction we register is more than likely to be different from the reaction that has actually taken place.

It seems strange to me that although man has thought it necessary in the course of his development in civilization to cultivate the potentialities of what he calls "mind," "soul," and "body," he has not so far seen the need for maintaining in satisfactory condition the functioning of the sensory processes through which these potentialities manifest themselves.

(*UoS*, pp. 78-79)

Alexander tells me time and again not to care a damn whether I get out of the chair or not, because he knows that this "not caring" (in this context) implies a refusal to end-gain and thereby allows *him* to take me up out of the chair with the least possible exertion on his part and allows *me* to experience a "correct" use of myself.

Alexander said today that we could put the matter this way—after I had prevented him from taking me up by trying to help him, which sounds utterly paradoxical, but I can testify to the utter truth of it—he said:

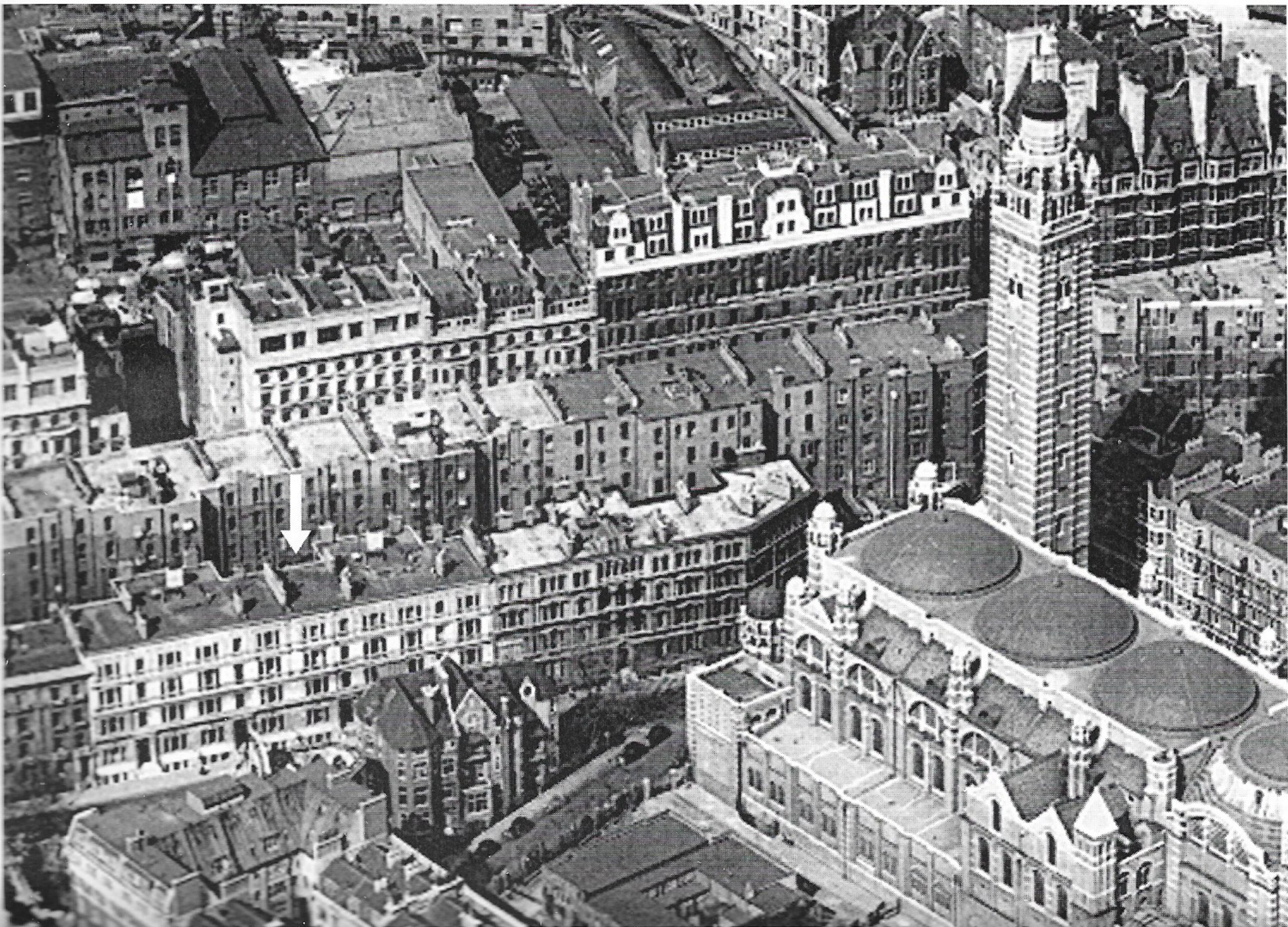
"You can even try to *prevent* me from taking you up. Put it that way, if it will help you."

...doing what feels wrong is paradoxically associated with a gradual improvement in the pupil's general use and functioning.

(*UCL*, p. 87)

"You see, once you get hold of this idea, once you can *carry out* your decision to inhibit, then there is nothing you cannot change in yourself in the matter of old habits. But if you or I were to tell people this, they would think we were mad. You see the point, don't you? Even with the great men I have had

Ashley Place and Westminster Cathedral, London, 1950, (Nº 16 is marked with an arrow)



among my pupils, none of them were able to stick to a decision to not do a thing, a decision they made two seconds before."

"Now, I will not try to take you out of the chair if you try to help me. No matter what you do, of course, I can get you out of the chair. But, you see, I don't want to do it if you try to help me. You must leave everything to me. I'll do the work, and if we don't get up, care not a jot. Some of my student-teachers here will insist upon taking a pupil out of the chair even when the latter tries to help them, which they should not do, of course. But I won't take you up if you try to help me, because I don't want you to get out of this chair unless you are going to have a right experience in the process. And you will have a right experience if you stop thinking about getting up. Don't think about getting up!"

February 7, 1952

A superb lesson! I went determined to make the decision *and to stick to it!* And was rewarded. If all continues to advance from this point, I shall be indeed, as Alexander said, on the road to Tipperary.

One has to *have* this marvellous experience in order to believe it. But even then, as I know so well, faith in the belief may not come easy.

Aldous Huxley writes, in his *Ends and Means* (1937):

Mr. Alexander has given a full account of his system in three books... It is therefore unnecessary for me to describe it here—all the more so as no verbal description can do justice to a technique which involves the changing, by a long process of instruction on the part of the teacher and of active co-operation on that of the pupil, of an individual's sensory experiences. ... A verbal description would mean something only to a person who had actually had the experience described; to the mal-co-ordinated person, the same words would mean something quite different. Inevitably, he would interpret them in terms of his own sensory experiences, which are those of a mal-co-ordinated person. Complete understanding of the system can come only with the practice of it. (p. 223)

John Dewey, in his introduction to *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual*, opens with the following paragraphs:

The principle and procedure set forth by Mr. Alexander are crucially needed at present. Strangely, this is the very reason why they are hard to understand and accept. For although there is nothing eso-

teric in his teaching, and although his exposition is made in the simplest English, free from technical words, it is difficult for anyone to grasp its full force without having actual demonstration of the principle in operation. And even then, as I know from personal experience, its full meaning dawns upon one only slowly and with new meanings continually opening up. Since I can add nothing to the clear and full exposition that Mr. Alexander has himself given, it has occurred to me that the most useful form this introductory word can take is an attempt to explain wherein lies the difficulty in grasping his principle.

The chief difficulty, as I have said, lies in the fact that it is so badly needed. The seeming contradiction in this statement is just one instance of the vicious circle which is frequently pointed out and fully dealt with in the pages of the text. The principle is badly needed, because in all matters that concern the individual self and the conduct of its life there is a defective and lowered sensory appreciation and judgment, both of ourselves and our acts, which accompanies our wrongly-adjusted psychophysical mechanisms. It is precisely this perverted consciousness which we bring with us to the reading and comprehension of Mr. Alexander's pages, and which makes it hard for us to realize his statements as to its existence, causes, and effects. We have become so used to it that we take it for granted. It forms, as he has so clearly shown, our standard of rightness. It influences our every observation, interpretation, and judgment. It is the one factor which enters into our every act and thought.

Consequently, only when the results of Mr. Alexander's lessons have changed one's sensory appreciation and supplied a new standard, so that the old and the new condition can be compared with each other, does the concrete force of his teaching come home to one. In spite of the whole tenor of Mr. Alexander's teaching, it is this which makes it practically impossible for anyone to go to him with any other idea at the outset beyond that of gaining some specific relief and remedy. Even after a considerable degree of experience with his lessons, it is quite possible for one to prize his method merely on account of specific benefits received, even though one recognizes that these benefits include a changed emotional condition and a different outlook on life. Only when a pupil reaches the point of giving his full attention to the *method* of Mr. Alexander instead of its results, does he realize the constant influence of his sensory appreciation. (pp. xxi-xxii)

February 11, 1952

Alexander confirmed today, of his own accord, my feeling that I am on the verge of securing a firm grasp of this work, a firm grasp of the *principle*; that I am on the verge of being able, of *allowing* myself, to put the principle into practice. This feeling has been strong the past two weeks.

At the end of the lesson, Alexander said: "You're on the brink now!"

His words excited me, and I told him how I had been feeling so strongly of late that this was, indeed, the case.

When I entered his study at 12:30 today, he was warming his hands before the coal fire. He still had his spats on, and he kept them on during the lesson. On cold, damp days like this one, he likes to move his teaching-chair in front of the fire and conduct his lessons there. Thus, facing the hearth, I could enjoy looking at the little *objets d'art* on the mantelpiece while having the lesson.

As I stood in front of the chair, Alexander said: "Now, let your head go up and out of my hand, and let the knees go forward and away from one another."

"You see, the entire *natural* movement of the spine is upwards, of the head is upwards. But as soon as we pull our heads back, we frustrate that natural activity of movement upwards."

I asked Alexander: "But does that [pulling our heads back] still apply to the times when we have to pull back our heads in order to look up, say, at a tall building?"

Alexander stepped around to stand in front of me and said:

"Ah, you see, my boy, when I do *that*, I don't *shorten* myself in order to do it. First *lengthening*, and then to bring the head back so that we may direct the eyes upwards. But, you see, most people, when they do this, shorten themselves in looking directly above them."

Several times, then, Alexander gave me the experience of lengthening and then gently tilting my head back so that I looked directly at the ceiling, during which I observed a complete absence of that stiffening of the back of the neck that one usually feels (if aware of it at all) in pulling the head far back in order to look upwards.

I said to Alexander: "I was looking at an anatomy book recently and noticed that the trapezius muscle sends two big cords up the back of the neck, extends outwards to the shoulders, and shoots down the back. Is it this muscle that we ordinarily use in pulling back the head in such a way as to counteract or frustrate the natural upward activity of the head and back?"

Alexander answered this question in a way that told me that the matter

of how individual muscles functioned was of no particular interest to him. He said:

"What is important about the muscles for me is their total working together—how they all work together in order to accomplish the lengthening and widening we want to obtain. Your question reminds me of a famous physiologist who said to a friend, while the two of them were watching me demonstrate on a pupil: 'Look at that! Here we know all about each and every muscle, what each one does and is supposed to do, and look at what Alexander is doing there!'"

The physiologist may know the names of the muscles and the particular function of every one of them, but in the matter of employing them to the best advantage in a unified working of the human organism in daily life, this knowledge does not help us very much.

(UCL, p. 112)

...[Physiology] does not and cannot indicate the means whereby these muscles are operated relatively to the individual's use of his mechanisms as an indivisible unity, so as to ensure that integrated working of the organism which we always find associated with the standard of functioning present in a person in whom the way of employing the primary control is a constant influence for good.

(UCL, p. 115)

"You see, all that the large muscles of the neck are supposed to do is to turn the head on its own axis and to tilt the head forwards and backwards and sideways. The trouble comes when we try to do with these muscles in the neck what we want to do and are supposed to do with the muscles of the legs, the arms, and so on."

"So, in our work, it's not just a question of relaxing the neck. That is the wrong point of view. The point is to stop doing with the neck what needs to be done only with the arms or legs, etc."

One can recall the expression or interest, happiness, and satisfaction exhibited by the child when one has enabled him to understand for the first time that his unduly stiffened neck—with perhaps his head too far pulled back—is really not the fault of his neck at all, but is due to the fact that he is trying to do with the muscles of his neck what should be done by other mechanisms.

(CCCL, pp. 181-182)

Let us take for example the case of a man who habitually stiffens his neck in walking, sitting, or other ordinary acts of life. This is a sign that he is endeavouring to do with the muscles of his neck the work which should be performed by certain other muscles of his body, notably those of the back.

(MSL, p. 57)

After quoting several passages in the Bible that attribute bad conduct to being "stiff-necked," Alexander said: "Yes, it's all there."⁶⁵ He quoted again St. Paul's remark: "That which I would do, I do not; that which I would not do, I do." He went on to say:

"When I read that, I thought it was one of the most tragic statements ever made. St. Paul was an extremely religious man, so anxious to do the right thing. But, you see, in spite of all that, it was of no help to him. He had thus to admit that tragic truth. And it is the same with all of us, you see. We see the same thing every day all around us. How many of your friends are ever able to stick to their fine resolutions? People want to give up their bad habits, habits that they know are bad for them. Yet, no matter how hard they try, they never succeed. But here, in our work, this is precisely what we are doing. When you come here, you are acquiring the very means-whereby that will enable you to change any or all of your habits."

The truth is that so far man has failed to understand fully what is required for changing habit if the change is to be a fundamental one, because he has not realized that the establishment of a particular habit in a person is associated in that person with a certain habitual manner of using the self, and that because the organism works as an integrated whole, change of a particular habit in the fundamental sense is impossible as long as this habitual manner of use persists.

(UCL, p. 76)

A good manner of use of the self exerts an influence for good upon general functioning which is not only continuous, but also grows stronger as time goes on, becoming, that is, a *constant* influence tending always to raise the standard of functioning and improve the manner of reaction.

(UCL, p. 5)

"In the beginning of my work, I did not know whether I would or could teach what I felt to be the truth. I used to say to my earliest pupils: 'Now tell

me whatever you think is wrong in what I am doing to put things right according to the principle that I believe to be the truth."

"You see, I've never approached my work and teaching with the view that this is all, that this is the answer and nothing more remains. As I said to Dewey one day: "I want to be proved wrong." If we go to work teaching something with such an idea as this, that there is nothing more than this to be said—how shall we ever discover anything more? But in all my years of teaching, nothing about my principle has been proved wrong or scientifically refuted in any way. And I know that nothing ever will be."

...my experience may one day be recognized as a signpost directing the explorer to a country hitherto "undiscovered," and one which offers unlimited opportunity for fruitful research to the patient and observant pioneer.

(UCL, p. xxxvii)

I have in daily lessons for nearly fifty years demonstrated to pupils and others the influence for good or ill of this constant upon their general functioning, and the fact that repetition of the demonstration is possible provides that kind of proof of the soundness of concept and principle, and of the technique, plan, or method based upon it, which is acceptable to the scientific engineer when he finds that in working to a concept or principle he can build a machine that, as a working mechanism, satisfies the need for which he designed it.

(UCL, p. xxxvi)

It has not been realized that the influence of the manner of use is a *constant* one upon the general functioning of the organism in every reaction and during every moment of life, and that this influence can be harmful or a beneficial one. ... Hence this influence can be said to be a *universal constant in a technique for living*. (*Ibid.*)

"When I teach, I teach the principle, I never forget that. Some of the younger teachers today tend to ignore the principle, to try and accomplish the work by means that ignore the principle."

My experiences... convinced me that in any attempt to control habitual reaction the need to work to a new principle asserts itself, the principle, namely, of inhibiting our habitual desire to go straight to our end trusting to feeling for guidance, and then of employing only

those "means-whereby" which indirectly bring about the desired change in our habitual reaction—the end.

(UCL, p. 25)

"Long before George Bernard Shaw became acquainted with my work, I wrote him concerning something he had written about learning to ride a bicycle. I told him that the first time I rode a bicycle, I rode for miles without falling off. Today, bicyclists tie their feet to the pedals—that's a result of my work. I explored the right means for the action of pedalling. [Here, Alexander demonstrated what he meant, sitting on a stool next to the chair and moving his feet in bicycling fashion. As he did so, I found myself marvelling at the free and generous movement of the legs made by this man of eighty-three years.] What we so rarely do is to examine the means whereby we may accomplish a particular act or deed."

"When we set out to do a thing, getting it done is not the really important thing. Rather, what is, above all, important, is to pay attention to what we are doing to ourselves while in the process of doing that which we set out to do."

March 10, 1952

After my last lesson a month ago, I went with friends on a three-week holiday, skiing, two weeks in St. Anton and a week in Zermatt. Being my first time on skis, I joined a beginner's class. After two days I was moved to a more advanced one. It's a marvellous sport. I got the feeling that nothing else mattered in the world but skiing.

I was depressed getting back to London. My friends said this was usual after being in the mountains. But seeing Alexander again was a great help. I saw him on March 6, and then today. During today's lesson he said:

"In you, the difference between sinking down, pulling yourself down, and allowing yourself to go up, is enormous. As I have said to you before, your back is so strong and powerful that if you are doing the wrong things with it, you do the wrong things twice as badly, you do twice as much damage to yourself, as the next fellow. You have enough strength there in your back to lift ten men your own size, if you allow it to work properly."

"I wish I didn't have to use the words 'standing up' and 'sitting down.' For they convey the old way of doing things. In standing up, for example, we don't just stand up and stop there: we go on with the activity of the head going forward and up, coming back to widen the back, allowing the ribs to contract and so on."

Expanding ideas are the forerunners of human advancement. The conveyance of the knowledge concerned with expanding ideas, whether by the written or spoken word, calls urgently for the recognition of the fact that expanding ideas demand new words which will adequately express the original as well as the new thought or thoughts involved.

(CCCL, pp. xiii-xiv)

In October 1951, about a month after I arrived back in London after my European tour with Anne and Paul, I met a Swiss girl, Gita Irminger, at The Linguist Club near Belgrave Square where I was taking French and German classes to get a reading knowledge of these languages to fulfil a requirement for the doctor of philosophy degree. Gita was from Zurich, studying fashion design at an art school in London. We were both living in Chelsea—she as a paying guest in the home of an English family on Burnall Street off King's Road; I in an apartment about half way between Sloane Square and the river Thames. My lease expired in March. Rather than renewing it, Gita and her adopted family invited me to move into their home as a paying guest. The family were Daisy Swanson and two daughters, Peggy and Jane, who worked as secretaries. A third daughter, Bobby, lived and worked in Rome. Daisy had lived most of her life in Vienna as the wife of a wealthy Jewish banker. They fled to London when Hitler annexed Austria, losing just about everything but their lives. Daisy took a job as a cashier in a restaurant. Her husband sold books in a used-book store for a few years and then died. Daisy was a marvellous cook, and Gita and I were treated as members of an expanded family.

March 13, 1952

Alexander told me of an occasion when he was asked by John Dewey to visit a "progressive" school in America.⁶⁶ He watched a psychologist working with several of the children. All of them exhibited a poor manner of using themselves. After the children left the room, Alexander asked the psychologist what it was he had done. The psychologist said he had observed the children carefully in order to make a judgment about their behavior and their potentialities. Alexander asked: "But how can you form such judgments when their use of themselves is obviously as bad as it is? How can you determine what their capacities and potentialities are when they are not able, under the present circumstances of their poor use, to properly manifest them? You wouldn't judge the performance of your car if you knew there were certain mechanical deficiencies in the engine."

I asked Alexander: "You mean that before judging the present and the prospective abilities of these children their poor use should be set right?" "Exactly so," he said.

Where the imperfectly co-ordinated child is concerned, its first need is to be readjusted and co-ordinated on a plane of conscious control, until the standard of functioning in psycho-physical use of the organism is adequate. The organism will then function as near to the maximum as is possible, and the potentialities for improved functioning will continue as the child gradually develops to that standard of conscious guidance and control in psycho-physical use which makes for the conditions essential to the fullest development of latent potentialities.

(OCCl, p. 137)

I said to Alexander: "There are two particular activities in which I notice a very definite tensing of my neck—eating and speaking." His answer was as follows:

"Very likely you are not tensing up but rather unduly relaxing, sinking down instead of going up, like this. We can't trust our feelings in these matters. So often a pupil complains to me that his legs are painfully tense. But I feel his legs with my hands and they aren't tense at all. I place the pupil's own hands on his legs, and he then sees that his feeling about them was wrong."

I then asked Alexander: "I've been wondering if perhaps the untrustworthiness of our feelings in respect to more or less physical processes in our bodies has any kind of parallel in, or extension to, our feelings in respect to other people?" He said:

"Yes, indeed. For we know how often the judgments that people make of one another are false or misleading judgments."

In consequence of the unreliability of his sensory impressions, man's interpretation of his own and other people's experience in living is too often faulty and illusive, and he is liable to arrive at false conclusions, and to form erroneous judgments, especially where the motives for his own and other people's behaviour and general activities are concerned.

(UCL, p. 97)

I asked Alexander how old George Bernard Shaw was when he had first

come to him for lessons. Alexander thought for a moment, and then said he was seventy-nine years old. He went on to say:

"When Shaw came to me, he was suffering from angina, and he could scarcely walk from here to across the street. He had to go a snail's pace, lest his heart trouble him. But in three weeks of work with me, he was walking heartily from here to his hotel."

March 17, 1952

A fairly good lesson, though it didn't quite fulfil my expectations. Alexander recommended a play, *Nightmare Abbey*,⁶⁷ at the Westminster Theatre, just a few blocks from Ashley Place. "Good acting, good laughs, a lot of philosophy," he said.

Alexander will teach until the end of July. He goes for holiday during August, returns in September. He said London is not a good place to be during August.

March 24, 1952

Alexander said he thought this lesson would prove of value to me because we had cleared up some points by talking them over. He said never to hesitate to ask him questions on things not clear to me.

His answers to my questions in this lesson were more or less what I expected them to be. What I gained from them was confirmation and eradication of some doubts. I particularly wanted to hear his answer to the following question: "In freeing the neck, in allowing the head to go forward and up, in lengthening and widening the back, and so on, we should make no attempt to feel these changes?" Alexander answered as follows:

"No. That's just it, you see. If you attempt to feel, to rely on your sensation of feeling, you can only revert to your old habitual way of doing. If we attempt to feel, we cannot help but do in the old way. The supremely important thing to remember is that here we are not interested in doing anything. As I have said before, we are not trying to be right. This is the principle of the whole work: *not to do something but to think!* We redirect our activity by means of thought alone. This principle is the hardest thing of all to grasp. People just don't see it. Yet we know that it works. It is demonstrable."

"When I teach you, I am giving you guidance with my hands. I don't want you to do anything. Don't try to be right. Leave everything to me. Except that you should be conscious of the experience you acquire under the direction of my hands, and that you, through thinking, allow yourself to be taught. That is the particular problem of the pupil: he must give me a chance to teach him."

The employment of inhibition calls for the exercise of *memory* and *awareness*—the former for remembering the procedures involved in the technique and the proper sequence in which they should be used, and the latter in the *recognition of what is happening*. In the process both potentialities are developed and the scope of the use of both gradually increased. Moreover the experiences thus gained not only help in developing and quickening the recalling and connecting memory, but cultivate what I shall call the motor-sensory-intellectual memory.

(UCL, p. 93, my italics)

"What we are doing is laying down new lines of communication. If I tell you to 'stand up,' and you react immediately to this, you will react according to the old lines of communication—which means, among other things, a stiffening of the neck and a pulling back of the head, and so on; all totally unnecessary to the act of standing up, and not only unnecessary but also *interfering* with standing up, so that we must needs expend excessive amounts of energy in order to overcome that negative tension and pull. On the other hand, if, instead, when I tell you to 'stand up,' you then say to yourself: 'No, I won't stand up,'—then this refusal inhibits your old customary reaction and thereby allows a *new* line of communication to be laid down, namely, the means-whereby of lengthening and widening, etc."

March 27, 1952

Right after the start of this lesson, Alexander asked me to "stand up" but not to give consent to this idea. Then he said, "Now, to stand up, allow the head to go forward and up, and come back to my arm..." The result was that I found myself sitting, or rather leaning, forward (!) in the chair, instead of standing on my feet. In other words, I had given consent to the idea—stimulus, order, command, suggestion, request, etc.—of standing up, thereby *interfering* with the primary control of my use, with the result that the difference between me and a block of stone was of little practical importance. Alexander stopped, stepped a few paces away from the chair and, turning, fairly shouted at me:

"There you are, you see. That's you! You can't get away from you! It's you—and you can't get away from it! You will try to get up!"

April 7, 1952

I went to this lesson thinking that it would not be a particularly good one. This was because I had felt during the week more or less stresses and strains, "physically." But, as usual, my feelings (which so often pass for thinking)

were wrong. During the week I had thought a good deal of two principles: *Not to try to be right* in anything I was doing, whether painting, talking or thinking of the "means-whereby;" and, secondly, *not to rely on my feelings*, not to trust any information they might give me. I started to write—not to rely on my feelings in respect to the matter of allowing my neck to be free, head to go forward and up, back to lengthen and widen. But I stopped myself because I had already included this, the "means-whereby," under the first principle, not to try to be right. This little incident has startled me into the realization that we are dealing here not with two principles but one principle. For it follows, as much as night follows day, that if you rely on your feelings, if you insist on relying upon them (in spite of your previous decision to the contrary), you are trying to be right! The reverse is equally true: if you try to be right, you are not *just* relying on your feelings but forcing yourself to rely on them!

As I said, my feelings were wrong in anticipating what sort of lesson I would have today, for it was, in fact, a good one. Alexander started me "standing up" and "sitting down" very soon after the lesson had begun; it was quickly obvious that, today at least, I was not interfering.

Non-interference is another way of looking at inhibition. I think it is a good term, for it expresses the idea that anything you *try to do* will result in interference with what Alexander is attempting to convey, i.e., the particular experiences associated with the primary control or the manner of use. So you might say to yourself: "I will not interfere with Alexander's teaching by trying to do what I think is right or what I think is the right thing to do." Alexander again stressed how important it is to grasp the principle of *non-doing*. He said he had racked his brain for a long time over the question of what was the best way to get this idea across to his pupils.

As long as we continue to react in "doing" according to our familiar habit of use, we, *by our own doing*, make change of use and reaction impossible.

(UCL, p. 25)

In my work we are concerned primarily with non-doing in the fundamental sense of what we should *not do* in the use of ourselves in our daily activities; in other words, with preventing that habitual misuse of the psycho-physical mechanisms which renders these activities a constant source of harm to the organism.

(UCL, p. 106)

And Alexander said again, as he had said so many times to me: "As soon as people see that something has gone wrong, they immediately start to do something to put it right. They feel they *have to do*, failing to realize that it is their very own habitual ways of doing that put the thing wrong to begin with."

It is what man *does* that brings the wrong thing about, first within himself and then in his activities in the outside world, and it is only by *preventing* this *doing* that he can ever begin to make any real change. In other words, before man can make the changes necessary in the outside world, he must learn to know the kind of doing he should prevent in himself, and the *how* of preventing it. Change must begin in his own behaviour.

(MSI, p. v)

Lest we get the wrong idea: it is not doing, in itself, that is wrong, needless to say. The idea is not to become a passive, inert lump of humanity. On the contrary, the idea is to become an active, free, poised, *live* human being.

It is a question, in other words, of transforming doing-which-interferes with the working-integrity of the self into doing-in-accordance with the working-integrity of the self. In order to achieve this, it is necessary, *essential*, to stop doing and to stop all idea of doing (inhibition) *for a time*. For only by *stopping* can one succeed in *registering* the experiences that lead to the transformation: to doing-in-accordance (volition) with the working-integrity of the self.

April 10, 1952

A good lesson. At its conclusion, Alexander said:

"Your best lesson so far. This was the kind of lesson I like to give, where I can see my pupil understanding his mistakes and visibly profiting from them."

At the beginning of the lesson, I was certainly interfering, not keeping to my decision to inhibit, to *allow* rather than *do*. But, for most of the lesson, I did succeed in keeping to this decision and thus "again" experienced the wonderful ease and effortlessness of this pattern of movement (from sitting to standing). I put "again" in quotes only to indicate that the right experiences gained in each lesson are never (and cannot be) precisely the same as those in the preceding lessons. Nor will tomorrow's right experience be identical with today's. This is a characteristic that is so striking of these lessons: the element of surprise that marks, almost without exception, each one of

them. At one point in today's lesson I exclaimed to Alexander: "It goes against all one's ordinary ideas and opinions!"

At the previous lesson I had taken a friend, a woman of great charm and intelligence from a well-known family, along for an interview or demonstration lesson with Alexander. Some years ago she had read his books and was now interested to meet him. I was present all through the interview (lesson), and while it seemed to me that it went well, I was once more impressed with the truth of Alexander's remark that the first thing the teacher has to do is to get his pupil to allow himself to be taught.

Later, during my lesson, Alexander asked me if my friend had had an illness over the last few years, adding that he would have thought so from her general condition. I said to my knowledge she had not, unless "lethargy" were an illness. He answered:

"Ah, yes, indeed it is. One can understand her lethargy from the way she slumped down in the chair, and from the way she stands, throwing her stomach forward and letting it fall."

He said he thought she would profit greatly from lessons. Then he added: "But she is not a person that one should try and persuade. That would be folly."

Considering the brief time he had spent with her, I thought this a most discerning remark. It expressed my feeling also, for I had already decided I would do nothing in the way of persuading her to have lessons, though I was convinced she would derive enormous benefit from them.

Twice this week, while drawing the model in life class, MacNab has come to me and said: "I think you should do as much painting as you can. It will be your salvation." He continued: "You are line-bound." He thinks I am too concerned with the line of the figure, neglecting the modelling, the roundness of the figure, etc. I think he is right. He thinks that painting will force me to pay more attention to this aspect of the figure. He asked what I had in mind for the future—"portraits, commercial work, or just the artist-at-large?" I said I hadn't given much thought to the future. He said: "You should paint and paint and paint!"

April 24, 1952

First lesson after an interval of two weeks.

I definitely have a new awareness of lengthening. This past week I have become aware of a tendency to push my stomach back (or to pull it in)—perhaps in the mistaken belief that I was thereby allowing my back to widen—and this was accompanied by a slight though distinct "pulling down" in

front. I also found that sometimes when I thought I was allowing (directing) my head to go forward and up, I was, in fact, putting my head forward and down, which was probably associated with the tendency to "push my stomach back." All of this, of course, indicates a trying-to-do rather than a non-doing and allowing.

May 7, 1952

A very good lesson.

Alexander said that excessive tension in the muscles tends to produce waste products. Thus a manner of use characterized by habitual tension may be exacerbated by the presence of such products. He spoke of this also in connection with exercises, which so far from doing anything to change or improve the manner of use, may tend to exaggerate the dis-co-ordinations and imbalances already present.

May 19, 1952

A red-letter day! My two paintings have been placed in the exhibition which opens tomorrow! The Chenil Galleries on King's Road. How pleased and happy I am! What a wonderful feeling it is! When I get the confidence in painting that I have attained in drawing, I shall have achieved something. I want to work hard and consistently, but with peace inwardly and confidence. My habit of doubting myself is slowly becoming an anachronism.

May 29, 1952

Another struggle, but perhaps a good lesson all the same.

I realized today, more deeply than ever it seems, that in spite of all I had previously thought and felt, I was not really making a firm or consistent decision to prevent my head from pulling back and thereby to allow it to go forward and up. The trouble is, I've been too concerned with "thinking about the end," as Alexander said, instead of the means-whereby.

From this lesson to the end of July I had nine lessons, one each week, for which I made no entry.

July 13, 1952

Have been painting steadily these past weeks. Have learned much from Ray Bethers,⁶⁸ painting at Heatherley. Four or five of us work in one room at Heatherley. He helps us all. Ray is an American artist, has published a book on composition, and uses Heatherley as a place to work.

Alexander takes a month's rest at the end of this month. Progress these past four weeks has been good. Unless things change, I plan to resume les-

sons with Alexander and study at the Heatherley School of Art in September. If so, I will be another year in England.

August 12, 1952

Taking Nuni, our little golden cocker spaniel, with me, I drove from our house in Chelsea, through South Kensington, up Exhibition Road, and through the gate into Hyde Park, parking amongst the line of cars in the car park just past the bridge over the Serpentine. From there, Nuni and I began our usual walk. We walked up to and around the police station and the tea house, passing close to the gate at Marble March. We have done this many times, and each time adds a little increment to my joy and surprise at finding myself in Hyde Park.

You might imagine that Hyde Park would be a joyous surprise to an American like myself, for where, I ask you, in all America, does one find anything comparable, in a city, I mean? New York, of course, has Central Park, a great park. But there is not the quality of *country* that possesses one in Hyde Park. It isn't that you can't escape from the sight of tall buildings surrounding you; no, Central Park just has not the sweep and naturalness of Hyde Park. For example, there is the great plain that runs from Marble March to Hyde Park corner. You get a wonderful view of this plain if you approach it from near the middle of Park Lane. Entering the park you come first to the line of trees. Standing there, on the edge of the park, you look beyond the tree trunks and see this plain sweeping from right to left and away into the distance, with a slight rise in the middle towards Bayswater. What a surprise it is to see this vast green area before one's eyes, while at one's back stands the stone and glass and noise of city life. If you stand there on a day when the air is a little hazy, bluish in the far distance and golden in the middle distance, seeing this plain through the wide dark lines of the tree trunks in the foreground, then you will have this scene spread out before you at its very best.⁶⁹

December 2, 1952

Here in London the fog continues into its third night. The only mode of transportation possible is walking—and that's dangerous if you don't know the area you're in. The *Sunday Times* this morning headlined it "London has worst fog in years." It's not just a clean fog, but a very dirty one. It settles on everything, penetrates doors and windows—it's in your room, where the rays of your lamps shine through it. The fog gets deep in your nose, throat and lungs—makes you cough. We went to a movie around the corner—figures loom up before you—you don't see them before they're two or three feet in front of you. The fog was in the movie house—the screen was blurred, and it

looked like they had a very weak bulb in the projector. We saw a girl standing outside the theatre, under the dim light of the marquee—waiting. We had seen her last night in the Builder's Arms with a soldier in the Grenadier Guards. You can't help but think of all the things that could happen in a fog like this, all unnoticed. You imagine whatever kind of underworld London has, it must emerge in force in the fog. The robbers and the cosh men that London papers are always full of must be having a free and easy time. But the fog is depressing, even though we tend to get used to it. It seems incredible that, if you could use your car, you drive ten miles or so, you would find yourself in the clear clean night, able to see the stars and the moon. What a relief this would be—so refreshing, able to breathe fully once again, because in the fog you automatically try not to breathe too deeply, to keep the stuff out of your lungs.

January 12, 1953

After my lesson of last July 24, now six months ago, I didn't see Alexander for a lesson until two weeks before Xmas. Alexander went north for his annual holiday during August and part of September. Gita and I and Peggy Swanson left for Italy the middle of August and, after two weeks in Zurich with Gita's family, returned to London on October 2. Today is my third lesson and, all told, my seventy-second lesson with Alexander.

I had put off seeing Alexander because my funds were running low after the holiday and Christmas was coming up. But the delay gave me a longer interval over which to test the stability of my new and evolving manner of use. The result is so encouraging. I have every reason to believe that in respect to my direction and control I am operating on a "new plane." My first two lessons in December confirmed this belief.

With today's lesson, however, I found myself up against the same old problem, as the following remarks of Alexander will show:

"Don't help me to get you out of your chair. You will persist in this, even though you know very well that I don't want you to help. If you want to help me, help me widen your back—come back to my arm. Widen your back. Let your head go forward and up. Let it go on up and forward. Don't think about getting up! As soon as you start to think about getting up, you will TRY to get up, and then you will forget all about the means—whereby and act according to your old habits and be misled by your feelings."

"This is not easy. If you can tell me how I can get this across to my pupils in a better way, you will be doing a great service to mankind."

I do not believe that the experience of today's lesson contradicts my remark above: "I had every reason to believe that in respect to my direction

and control I was operating on a 'new plane.' Because it is apparent to me that we are dealing here with a principle and a process of growth and change to which there can be no final state of perfection. The process and practice of the Alexander Technique involves a never-ending passage from, in Rowntree's words "the known to the unknown." Indeed, I believe that whoever engages in the practice of the Technique is taking an evolutionary step.

January 15, 1953

A superb lesson! Alexander said: "That's the best you've done!" I was confident that I would have a good lesson today. In thinking about the work prior to the lesson, I reminded myself again to STOP! to SLOW DOWN! For it is certainly a question of reacting too *quickly* to each and every stimulus to do something, and it makes no difference whether this is a stimulus arising from within the self or one external to the self, inasmuch as, in both instances, the mechanisms involved in the *manner of reaction* must be the same. Obviously, if you do not give yourself enough *time* to put in motion the means-whereby, you make change in your manner of reaction impossible.

...there is one phase of the technique and its history which I should like to stress at this time. It relates to the way in which the nature of behavior is determined by the *speed of response* (reaction) to stimuli.

There came a time, early in my career, when I became aware that I was wasting my energy; wasting it, because my too-quick reaction was a serious stumbling-block to me in practically everything I tried to do. How well I remember the words of an old man, the dearest friend of my younger days, "the more hurry, the less speed," and the kindly yet tormenting question of my mother and father, who would often ask me, "Why don't you think before you speak or act?" On one occasion I remember I retorted angrily that it was easy enough for them to ask that question, but impossible for me to answer it. The objective proof that this "impossible" was rendered possible by subsequent experience can be found in *The Use of the Self*.

(MSI, pp. viii-ix)

Such were my thoughts while dressing after my bath this morning, while putting on my shoes, etc., and I remembered Dewey's succinct descriptions of the Technique as "thinking in activity," "a revolution in thought and action." I was struck by the aptness of the former phrase. When "thinking in activity," you maintain awareness of the *HOW* (manner of use) as well as the

WHAT of your doing. To this there will be some who say: how tiresome, how tedious to be made aware of all this. Isn't life complicated enough?

In a sense, the objection is justified. For most people everywhere, their manner of use is deleterious, their sensory appreciation is inadequate, is untrustworthy; and so life is *already* complicated, and then the prospect of an expanding awareness in respect to all the doings and undergoings of the self would appear only to increase the burden. Precisely this is the whole point, the heart of the matter: that most of our judgments, opinions, estimates, about what is and will be, are influenced by what we are, i.e., our manner of action and reaction in daily life. In various ways, Alexander makes this point many times over in his books, and, while the thesis is not new—is even a truism—Alexander has not only described the nature of the influence, he has gone further; he discovered the mechanism in behavior that more than anything else *makes* us what we are, namely, the *primary control* of the manner of use. The *technique*, the procedure of re-educating others and of carrying on the re-education of ourselves (of which this diary is a description and exemplification), is, in a sense, a rehearsal of the steps that Alexander took in the making and demonstration of this discovery.

As far as we can judge, mankind has not had the experience of thinking in activity where the projection of messages necessary to the employment of the primary control of his use is concerned. In the ordinary way man has just reacted instinctively to any stimulus to activity, whereas in the new plan which I am suggesting the messages, preventive and otherwise, must be consciously projected in *their right sequence* throughout the activity.

(UCL, p. 92)

...after some time the pupil can begin the inhibition of the wrong use of the primary control in all the simple and other acts of life, for this is largely a matter of that process of remembering which is involved in "thinking in activity"—a new way of living—and when once he has experienced the joy and satisfaction of this, it is difficult to believe that the old way could be reverted to. The new way of use will have come to feel right while the old way will feel wrong.

(UCL, pp. 88-89)

As I said, this was a superb lesson, and Alexander confirmed it when he said, "That's the best you've done!" The truth is that I made an experiment during this lesson which may, I think, have had something to do with its suc-

cess. I made a point of more or less directly attending to the movement and placing of Alexander's hands—on my head, neck, shoulders, back, chest, and so on. And it seemed to me that I thereby experienced a readier response, so to speak, to the *direction* his hands communicated to me. I think the explanation for this lies in the fact that, in consequence of paying attention to the movement and placing of his hands, I enabled myself to take my mind off my own feelings, to forego preoccupation with what was happening to me and therefore to resist the temptation to feel what was going on in the usual way. In effect, I put my own particular involvement as an ego off to one side so that I became, one might almost say, a "participant observer"—I did not stand in the way of my own *allowing*.

January 16, 1953

I seem to be really getting Alexander under my belt this week. I tell myself to "stop feeling!" and I shed tensions like a duck sheds water.

January 19, 1953

From the start of this lesson I directed myself to *stop feeling!* For I have concluded that feeling, whatever else we may say about it, is a form of doing. True, it is covert and invisible, and an observer would say that we were doing nothing at all—but perhaps it is *doing*, all the same. This conclusion goes just a step beyond my previous thinking on the subject. Many lessons ago (see entry for November 7, 1951) I had what to me was a wonderful experience, an experience that followed upon my more complete realization that feelings and sensations can be misleading, that they were misleading me! With that, I went beyond the mere intellectual understanding of Alexander's assertion that the sensory appreciation associated with an instinctive control and direction of use—at least at this stage of man's evolution—is untrustworthy. However, I did not connect feeling or sensation with *doing*, in the sense of performance of an act or a movement. Indeed, I suspect that no matter how quiet and tiny the feeling or sensation there is very likely some muscular activity going on as accompaniment.

What I am attempting to say in the above paragraph comes down to this: that there is very little difference, if any, between trying to do something (as we ordinarily think of doing) and trying to feel something (as we ordinarily think of feeling). The latter is as likely to interfere with conscious direction and control in the use of the self as is the former. In either case, we are trying to be *right!* The result is to interfere with the sensory awareness of experiences that are, in the nature of the case, bound to feel wrong!

During this lesson, all seemed to go well, at first. Alexander followed his

usual procedure. He placed his left hand on top of my head, his right hand on the back of my neck and then on the upper part of my back and shoulders, and then his left hand on my side just below the chest—"in order to allow the ribs to contract and expand," etc., etc. And then he repeated the "orders" constituting the means-whereby to, in this case, rise from the chair—and then, "coming back to my arm..." But right here, at this point, I interfered with myself. I did not "rise" from the chair. Alexander said: "There, you see, you are trying to get up!"

In my answer to this comment, I repeated exactly what I had said on a similar occasion many lessons previously when I exposed the stupidity and error of my ways. I realized this as I answered him, but I *had* to say it again because I wanted him once more to drive the lesson home to me, a lesson that is utterly contrary to what ordinary experience has given one to believe and expect. I answered: "But it seemed absolutely impossible to me that I should be able to stand up from the position I was in." He said:

"Well, there you are! You see, by what you have just told me you were not inhibiting the desire to get up. In fact, you were *thinking* of getting up from the chair!"

Of course I saw the truth of this but whether for this or some other reason, I laughed aloud at myself. Alexander said:

"You see, it's all so much a matter of belief and intent. We have to banish these beliefs. The trouble is, we refuse to believe in the means-whereby. If we sat down and traced the beliefs we hold back to their sources, we would find precious few good reasons for holding on to them any longer."

He then went on to make the following remarks:

"I use my hands as little as possible on my pupils, having cultivated this use."

"I spent hours, days, months, even years, practising inhibition. I had no one standing by my side telling me what not to do. I kept it up, until one day I got up out of my chair without effort of any kind. I just shot right up."

"We cannot progress any further until you succeed in inhibiting the idea of getting up out of the chair. What you should do away from me is to *think these things out!*"

March 17, 1953

Today I spent more time than ever in thinking of the "orders" or means-whereby while sitting in a chair, standing, walking or whatever it was I was doing. The results were immediate and striking. Not the least among them was the entirely different sense that I had of myself. Indeed, when I think

about it, I can scarcely remember what it was like to be me at the time I started these lessons.

April 15, 1953

We went to Cornwall for the Easter holidays. The high point of our visit, for me anyway, was our meeting Ben Nicholson⁷⁰ and Barbara Hepworth⁷¹ in their studios. Ben Nicholson is a small man, but strongly built and agile on his feet. He wore an orange colored sweat-shirt, the sleeves pulled up to his elbows. His pants were tucked in at the ankles, and he wore sandals. His voice is high pitched but pleasant. His eyes come to a point at their outside corners—blue eyes. His hair perfectly white, bald on top. He said he didn't think one could be taught to paint. He said there was no such thing as "technique" in painting. Before leaving, I bought a small painting titled *Two Circles*, for 40 guineas.

May 10, 1953

On Friday I submitted two pictures to this year's Artists of Chelsea Exhibition—an oil on canvas titled *House and Barns* and a drawing in black crayon of a girl student at the art school. I feel confident they will be accepted. If not, I shall take it as bad judgment of the jury, not as a reflection of bad painting or drawing.

May 12, 1953

My pictures have been accepted, and the private view is tomorrow.

May 16, 1953

When Gita and I went to see the exhibition today, the ticket collector told us that one of my two pictures had been sold! What a wonderful surprise. It was the drawing of the girl student. And what a spur to work! I've been drawing and painting all day, in oil on cardboard—the pieces that come inside the shirts from the laundry.

May 21, 1953

Had my first lesson with Alexander since Easter. He called it my best lesson. "The best you've done." And he agreed to take me into his teachers' training course in June!

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The above is my last diary entry. I joined the teachers' training course in mid-June, 1953.