

# THE ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE IN THE TRAINING OF ACTORS

*Steven Hallmark*

DURING a lesson with Walter Carrington, I made the rash comment that I thought it possible that actors could glean all they need for their theatre training from the table and chair work that comprises the standard lesson in the Alexander Technique. Some weeks later he asked me to elaborate in writing. This piece is the result. I hope to show that standard Alexander lessons can and should provide the means for actors to prepare themselves for all the activities they engage in; and that it should be the underlying practical and theoretical knowledge needed for the development of any theatre skill.

To begin, I think it necessary to recall my own experiences with training as an actor at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art.

Like most people who get accepted at a major drama school, I had had previous amateur experience. I had developed good confidence as an amateur actor, possibly about as much as one could hope to get at that level, in that I had had large roles, been written about kindly in local newspapers and generally thought by my peers and teachers to have the potential for the next, professional, level.

I was very glad to be at LAMDA. It was a challenge but one I wanted. All the students were a bit nervous to begin with. There are, after all, expectations of higher standards; and everyone has dreams about being successful, having come so far. The Deputy Principal was Frank Whitton, whom I and many others remember as a brilliant acting teacher. On the very first day at school he told us that we had been chosen because he and his colleagues believed in our talent. For that reason, they were going to take the responsibility of training us, and we were not to worry about being thrown out of school. Since there is great competition to get to drama school, and since students are con-

cerned about being thrown out, I was very lucky in having that worry nipped in the bud immediately. It gave me great reassurance and was an invitation to experiment in class without fear of failure.

As time went on, however, I became doubtful about some of the voice and the movement training. And the suspicion grew as to whether or not the voice classes were helpful, since I had had some success on stage with a minimum of technical training. I realised later I was not alone with such doubts. Many actors wonder, at some point in their training, how they can possibly carry the breathing technique they have been given, into an acting situation (“How can I play King Lear and breathe like this?”). Or they wonder how the ballet, yoga, Pilates, or whatever movement training they are having will enable them to discover and embody the movement of their characters. This turns into a reluctance to use these techniques on stage. Some teachers of these techniques, perhaps picking up on this reluctance, adopt mildly or not so mildly sadistic attitudes. (“We will practice this into the lunch hour today and go without lunch.”) Or they offer assertions such as “the more you practice, the more second nature it will become”, thereby implying that if the specific technique isn’t working, it is because you haven’t been practising it enough. I wondered how these techniques would benefit me, though I could not claim the years of experience that might have given me the answer.

In my final year at LAMDA I started suffering from a bad back, and was now worried about being thrown out (Frank Whitton, at this stage, having left). It was suggested by one of my movement teachers that I go for Alexander lessons and I had my first lesson with Mary Holland in April 1973.

I remember the first lesson very well. Mary offered to show me a better way of standing up from a sitting position. She suggested that I should first decide that I was *not* going to stand up in the way I was used to. This was very intriguing. She explained that instead of my usual way of doing it, I was to want my head to go up over my feet. She pointed in the direction of the movement. Then she stood me up, showing me how easy it could be. This was an extremely pleasant shock – instead of hours of agony working things out for myself, I

was going to be shown. I gathered that the thought of “forward and up” prevented a muscular tension in my neck, which otherwise would pull my head back and down. If my head got pulled backwards and down, then the weight of my head would cause a significant change of balance backwards. In order to maintain my balance I would stiffen – shortening my muscles all over, contracting my body, thereby putting pressure on my joints and internal organs and interrupting my breathing. In this way *any* activity became more difficult because, whenever I went to move, I would need to counter the effort I was already making by contracting myself even more, putting excessive pressure on my joints, internal organs and ribcage. I learned that pulling my head back was an acquired habit, which happened very quickly in the moment of preparation for standing, and which I had had no consciousness of until then. Neither had I had any consciousness of the tension I was causing in myself. In her lesson I was shown how to check that habit, by agreeing not to perform the act of standing in my normal way.

After the first lesson I burst into a skip and then a run down the road. Back on stage, I found I had a marvellous sense of being able to do almost anything I wanted without any care, worry or restraint. There was no “clutter” or interference between thought and action. What I wanted was what I got. I could think quickly and be spontaneous. I had a sense that was renewed from moment to moment, that I was performing optimally – to the best of my ability. I felt I was doing all that I could do at that moment, and if audiences did not like it then I would have to take up another profession! I could not imagine how this happy state could be produced by the exercises I was used to. This extraordinary “togetherness” came from my Alexander lessons, in which only a table and chair was used.

I found out that I no longer needed to think about a part of myself in order to “control” it (my voice, for instance); everything was working for me. In rehearsal and class I had no censoring thoughts or doubts. The quality of my work I could not judge, but I did not care too much anyway because I was enjoying myself. It was like I *knew* what to do. Of course I did want to know how the audience was

reacting, so I kept the occasional eye on them and, as far as I could tell, they were engaged.

I remember asking Mary whether or not I needed to do tongue exercises any more. These exercises had plagued me so much they had made me doubt my prospects. You cannot, I thought, be a film star if you cannot even control your tongue! This was a source of considerable apprehension. Having demonstrated how my head and neck was a primary influence on my balance in the act of going from sitting to standing, Mary's reply was something like: "Well, the head and neck are more important". It was a great relief to discover that there was an easier and more practical way of "control" – that the tongue would sort itself out in time within the context of better general integration of myself. It confirmed what I sensed, but did not have the knowledge to explain: that some exercises were making me worse as an actor, not better. Exercises in movement, voice and acting are normally taught separately and, without any teaching on *how* to integrate them, remain separate, and are applied as separate disciplines. After lessons, all this separation ceased to be an issue. If I could not do my tongue exercises without stiffening, holding my breath, and in effect un-balancing myself, then there was no point in doing them, at least for the time being.

These lessons started to bring out performances of a quality I recognised from my amateur days, but the difference was that now I had a "handle" on it so I could begin to access what was in me, at will. It occurred to me that whatever merit there was in these amateur performances, an important part of being professional would be the ability to reproduce them consistently, and that an acting technique might consist of finding a way to do just that – find a performance, for example, on days when I might not feel very much like performing. At an early stage in the lessons I found I could use the lying down procedure I had been shown and find my own way towards the state I recognised as having been reached in the lessons, which was enabling these performances. This seemed to me to be a clue about gaining an acting technique, in that it was something I could make practical use of, giving me independence and so providing a source of great opti-

mism about my prospects. Much was said at LAMDA about “acting technique” in general, but I could not find a way of making the acting techniques on offer work for me, and therefore viewed them with a mixture of scepticism and worry. The success that drama students have usually experienced at an amateur level cannot be denied them, even if they later learn better ways of studying texts and preparing themselves to act. However, if certain exercises and techniques get in the way of what they already know, then they need to find out why, in order to reject or avoid them with a good conscience. Alexander Technique supplied that knowledge for me.

The basic procedures of table and chair work in an Alexander lesson contain essentials needed for acting. Lying down in table work, you learn to pause and be still without losing muscle tonus – or what actors might call “energy”. In chair work an Alexander teacher assists the pupil to produce the appropriate effort for the task, not too much and not too little (as so perfectly laid out for us in the “Speak the speech” monologue in *Hamlet*). In chair work, as in acting, the appropriate energy has to be expended, neither more nor less. Simplicity of action is the aim and it is achieved by proper preparation. Conversely, the successful, simple outcome of the procedure confirms indisputably that the correct preparation has been achieved. The procedure therefore has an innate rigour.

Some sort of preparation for actors is crucial before going on stage, because they want to have some confidence that what they will eventually do will be effective – when the mouth is finally opened, that the right sound and meaning comes out; or when the movement or gesture is finally committed to, that it suits the occasion. That the correct preparation has been achieved in the Alexander lesson is confirmed experimentally by simple standing or sitting. One example of misguided preparation occurs when actors carry out what they call “relaxing”, but which is in fact collapsing, in that it entails a sinking downwards of the whole body. This “sinking” is associated with a loss of tonus and therefore with a lack of support for the movements of the breathing mechanisms. It makes the body floppy. If an actor’s body, or a part of it, were collapsing, the imaginative processes of that

actor could not be revealed, because the appropriate gestures could not be made. It is questionable whether intention can be conveyed with floppy arms or floppy bodies. In an Alexander lesson, the teacher demonstrates how to make the support system work – the system which makes rising out of a chair simple and which make it possible for arms and hands to be free to be available to make clear, meaningful gestures. Truthfulness lies in that ability to be simple. The appropriate tonus in the muscles makes it possible to carry out intention simply, neither doing too much nor too little.

The Alexander lesson is a contrived situation (as is a play), in that one is taking the act of rising from a chair, or sitting from standing, to illustrate a practical and universal principle about all acts. Finding out what is needed for such a banal, simple act starts the process of regaining reality or truth – to marry action with intention. Within the world of the play, actors have to find truth and play truthfully. Stanislavski's requirement for acting was "truth in an artistic form", and the Alexander Technique may be said to be "truth in action and reaction". If you wanted to get out of a chair but you were collapsing while doing it, there would be an obvious mismatch between intention and action. The action not being suited to the word (bad acting) is more often than not the result of bad coordination. (I am leaving out "suiting the word to the action" because actors are not often in a position to change the script.) The attuning of the action to the word can be achieved efficiently by the coordination of the whole of oneself.

In acting, as in the Alexander Technique, the interplay of thought with muscular action, movement, gesture, vocal use, and breathing needs to be examined, explored and mastered. I wish to describe some of the exercises which help people to make connections between acting and the Technique.



I worked in a new drama school in Stockholm from 1993 until 1999. The Alexander Technique was then very little known in Sweden, and the actors in this school had never heard of it. I discovered that if

they were to make use of my work, it would involve quite a lot of change for them, not only in their technical understanding of what they needed (for example how their breathing mechanism worked, or what “relaxation” might consist of), but even in their aesthetic appreciation of acting. What follows is a description of my workshops in the application of the Technique to acting.

### **First workshop: Being taken for a walk**

I made a general introduction about the Technique and gave a brief practical demonstration to all of the students, individually. I took the example of rising out of a chair as I have described above. It is simple and practical, and actors are interested in what works and what does not.

Then I asked the students to get into pairs. I asked them, one in each pair, to put their hands on their partners, one hand on the back and one on the front, opposite the first. I asked them to take their partners for a walk but without pushing or forcing their partners around. Their partners’ job was to allow themselves to be taken for a walk. The one who had the hands on was called the “genius”, since they were to have good ideas as to where to go; and the other was called the “idiot”, since they were the ones who followed the suggestions of the “genius”. (“Friend” might be a good word to use because that’s how it is – very friendly – but “idiot” usually causes more laughter.)

The names “genius” and “idiot” come from red-nosed clown training. If you asked a red-nosed clown to walk around a room, he or she would be quite convinced that it would be the best idea ever thought of in the history of the world. The relationship of the clown (the idiot, who is dying to try out marvellous ideas given by the genius) to the ringmaster (the genius) would make that inevitable! Adopting this clown relationship creates a light-hearted, optimistic, experimental atmosphere. That it can be associated with poise, breathing, lightness on the feet, and an excellent mental attitude is no coincidence.

In this “taking for a walk” exercise, the “idiots” will collapse somewhat at the beginning, because they assume that they must “relax” to allow the “geniuses” to take them around. But they discover that

collapsing is not conducive to movement, because they move so painfully slowly, especially since the “genius” has decided beforehand not to push their “idiot” about. After a while, if they have not thought of it themselves as a result of the earlier brief demonstration, I ask them to remember how we thought about the importance of our heads in relation to rising from a chair. Such thought immediately reorganises and lightens the balance of the “idiot”, making it easier both for the “idiot” to allow movement, and for the “genius” to initiate it. The “idiots” have thus found out how to organise and take charge of their own balance so that they can allow their “genius” to take them around the room, and the “genius” finds it easier to take them. The “idiots” learn that the “mental” process of “allowing” is active and not passive and it has its “physical” concomitant. Genuine “allowing” does not happen if they simultaneously produce a muscular response that actually prevents movement. All actors must have reasons (intentions) for going onstage and it would be counterproductive if their muscles were working against their intentions. In this game, because they have a predominating wish to move freely and without force, they learn quickly what is useful with regard to “relaxing”, or their idea of it, as well as the difference between collapsing and being rigid. The “idiots” learn that by collapsing or going rigid they interfere with the role of the “geniuses”. So they are forced to find within themselves the sort of balance by which they can allow the “geniuses” to lead. Since this “allowing” does require active consent on the part of the “idiot”, the “idiots” need to know how to keep their integrity whilst being moved around.

To develop the game further, I suggested the “geniuses” might like to minimise the effort they used when taking their “idiots” for walks. The “geniuses” were to decide to take *themselves* to places around the room, with their hands still on their “idiots”, and to wait for their “idiots” to follow. This represented a change of attitude from what they had planned to do with their “idiots”, into how they were going to manage themselves; from a direct control of the “idiot” into an indirect control through managing themselves. This was a new attitude for many. One of the skills actors have to learn is how to inhabit their



own roles and not play the roles of others or anticipate what they think the other “should” be doing. Since, by this time, the “idiots” have learned how to keep their own balance intact, the “geniuses” do not have to worry about them. So the “idiots” do not interfere with the ideas coming from the “geniuses” (by collapsing or becoming rigid) but are happy to follow.

What was needed to initiate a movement now took less effort. The next instruction was that they should stand still for a moment. (Actors must learn to be still – but without losing vitality, without “dying” as is sometimes said. Actors want to be interesting to an audience even when they are “doing nothing” on stage.) The “geniuses” were then asked to develop their own wish (Stanislavski might call it “intention”), either to move backwards or forwards. Then they were asked to choose one of those two directions whilst not losing the possibility of changing their minds and choosing the other. This was important because a characteristic of balance is the freedom to change direction easily. They were asked to sustain the wish to move in that direction (whilst keeping the option to go in the other) and wait until their “idiot” realised where they wanted to go. A *genuine* wish to move organises and galvanises the musculature of the “genius”. If the wish is not genuine, nothing happens. It confirms or denies the “geniuses” genuineness in a rigorous way. The actor gets an experience of the difference between real intention and pretence. The genuine wish gets communicated to the “idiot” just as an experienced ballroom dancer communicates a direction of movement to their partner. The wish on the part of the “genius” generates the energy and, providing they are not working against their own wishes by contracting (shortening in stature), it mobilises their muscles. The genuineness of their wishes get confirmed when their “idiots” catch on, and move. This game therefore ultimately becomes an exercise in the realisation and conveyance of truthful action and reaction.

In yet another development of the game the “geniuses” could start a walk with their “idiots” and then gradually develop their own wish to go faster around the room. By this time the intentions of the “geniuses” were getting communicated as a result of the work they had

done and the “idiots” started to move quickly too. (“That’s what I thought you wanted,” they often said.) So the actor playing the “genius” got the experience that what he or she wanted to be communicated *was* communicated.

The “geniuses” were required to maintain their attention on themselves for long periods, which was not at all easy if they were used to thinking what the other “should” be doing. So they learned not to “help” each other by anticipating the other’s role (response), but to stay in their own roles. The actors were getting more cheerful at this point, because they did not have to worry about what the other was doing. Each was able to play his or her role and take pleasure in the skill of the other. If they lost their attention, they learned to stop, and then continue when they had revived their intentions again.

When both the “genius” and the “idiot” are ready for movement, without knowing where they are moving, they maintain their alertness – which is exactly the same skill that would be exercised in an Alexander lesson. Each experience of this attitude of readiness, in the acting class and in the Alexander lesson, is a reinforcing experience for the actor, *if* the connections between the two are made.

Making connections between different subjects is hindered by the prevailing attitude in schools, whereby, when one lesson has ended, one is “doing a different subject” – separated arbitrarily by a bell or a timetable. I believe this has contributed to a tendency not to make connections between different subjects. As the Alexander Technique demands that people connect it to their work and lives, it is often necessary to communicate these connections to beginners.

### **Second workshop: Improvisation**

At one of Keith Johnstone’s workshops on improvisation I was intrigued to hear him justifying inbuilt rules (about what you are not supposed to do in his improvisation exercises) by pointing out that all children have rules in their games. In the game of tennis, he said, you are not allowed to hit a ball beyond the tramlines, and nobody complains that it makes the game of tennis worse. The first “rule” in the Alexander Technique is what not to do. This is to avoid restrict-

ing the optimal innate mobility and readiness that one is capable of. Defining “rules” may sound restrictive to some, but the rules of Keith Johnstone’s improvisation exercises and Alexander Technique activities exemplify how it can be anything but repressive. They both open up possibilities of reaction within a prescribed boundary. It creates a wonderful security within which there is licence.

I used one of Johnstone’s exercises in which there are two people on stage. One starts off by saying “Good morning”. This is deliberately banal and so it removes the pressure to come up with something exciting and original. The rule of the game is that you must not negate the suggestion you get from your partner. If someone says “Good morning” and the other says, “No, it isn’t”, then the game is at an end. Instead, you take what has been said to you, develop it positively and give it back. The reply might be “Yes, it is a good morning. I feel like going for a run – how about you?” then “Ooh, yes – I particularly like running about and splashing in puddles, don’t you?” then “Yeess...” and then they might mime splashing about in puddles, etc. This trains the “fantasy muscle”, and students quickly learn to think in an expanding way while being in control.

Improvisation is an art of not knowing what is about to take place (even in front of a large audience), and having the strength and poise not to be put off, yet the quickness of mind to respond according to the rules. Keeping oneself in readiness while arresting one’s habit of anticipating is the key to successful improvisation, and this is exactly what is being trained in an Alexander lesson.

Not stiffening the neck and pulling the head back is a “rule” in an Alexander lesson. This allows one to maintain one’s balance and its concomitant vitality while being ready for movement, any movement, and any action. “Ready for anything” is perfect for actors who must be able to improvise. Having a preparatory thought about what to avoid, what does not need to happen, is quicker than trying “to get oneself right” before doing something. *Preventing any disturbance of one’s freedom to take action is far more useful than trying to be correct* (which just causes stiffening and worry). It facilitates true improvisation. Understanding the postural mechanics of being “ready for anything” constitutes, I

believe, the basics of the actor's self-control. What is here learned in improvisation is carried over into other kinds of acting.

### **Third workshop: Stanislavsky**

You can tell a lot about a person from the way he or she draws a curtain; you can tell a lot about people's general state by their specific acts. In an Alexander lesson it is demonstrated how the efficiency of rising from a chair is conditioned by how we are (our general state) before we stand up. With the Technique we discover to what extent our general state is a causal factor in our reactions, utterances, and behaviour.

If our "general state" includes the attitude of "trying to be right" or trying to do something "correctly", it will also include stiffening, anxiety and worry. This in turn leads to a loss of spontaneity and daring – essentials for acting.

A better strategy is to improve one's "general state". Instead of learning to do specific things separately (voice, movement or acting as taught separately), one can create the circumstances, the "general state", where anything *can* happen because one maintains a freedom to speak or move in any direction.

There is an obvious connection between "general state" and Stanislavski's technique of "given circumstances". This refers to the general state of individual characters in a play, and the external circumstances in which they find themselves. The "given circumstances" of characters give rise to their behaviour and reactions. It is useful when studying a part to trace the behaviour of your character to its "given circumstances" – the historical context, for example. The "given circumstances" of the character influence, define and sometimes make predictable their future actions and their inner life. If they have studied Stanislavski, actors will already have the knowledge that "given circumstances" in acting is a source of action and reaction. The Alexander Technique gives them the experience that an improvement in their own general state reveals itself in improved reactions and behaviour in their lives. Because this experience is so concrete and indisputable it becomes self-evident to transfer that strategy to acting.

Stanislavski developed the technique of “actions”. He showed that the inner lives of the characters were revealed by what they do – “actions” – to achieve their intentions. “Actions” are lists of what characters incontrovertibly do on stage that can be seen or heard or otherwise perceived. They might be to “walk into the room”, “pull up a chair”, “ask a question”, “command”, and so on. They must be actable.

When discovering their “actions”, actors have to be careful not to be too quick to judge or analyse why their characters perform these “actions”, and what they reveal. Non-judgement is essential because the actor eventually wants the performance of the “actions” to reveal the inner state of the character. One can get too eager to guess what the character is like, in the excitement of getting to know the character as soon as possible. Too quick judgement hinders the creative process because that judgement is often based on preconceived ideas or is liable to be a superficial cliché, and later on it becomes difficult to get over one’s initial, unsubstantiated ideas. Instead of making judgements, the actor in the rehearsal has to allow the “actions” to reveal the character’s inner state. The approach of taking time, withholding consent to one’s immediate reaction in order to think and consider the next step, that one gets from Alexander lessons, becomes a basic acting technique.

In an exercise with my student actors, I asked them to 1) come on stage, 2) look at a clock, 3) walk to a table, 4) take up a newspaper, and 5) read it. These were their “actions”.

It can be difficult to get an actor to do these things and nothing else. Many will want to add things that they think make the performance more interesting, out of worry that they are being boring. They sometimes like to *feel* they are acting, and they judge that by the amount of extraneous activity they produce. The experience of *knowing* they are acting, rather than having to feel it, is not always something they have realised is possible. *Knowing* comes from the repeated experience, gained in rehearsal, of playing “actions” truthfully.

In an Alexander lesson, the seemingly banal act of rising from a chair is used experimentally to discover the appropriate effort by

which to carry out that act efficiently and simply. This usually involves paring down the extraneous effort a pupil might use and directing energy to under-used muscles that are more appropriate for the task. Most people would probably start out by trying to work out what to *do*, how much effort to make, to carry it out. It is a new concept for most to start by considering what is *not* needed for the task *before* considering what must happen to carry it out. This primary preventative attitude is the perfect preparation for performing “actions”, where mobility and readiness, exactitude and honesty are essential. The reward the Alexander pupil gets for this preparation is to be assisted by the teacher to move simply from standing to sitting. The experience forms a sort of personal yardstick of simplicity, which can be transferred directly to the performing of “actions”.

It is also a fact, not usually realised at first by inexperienced actors, that they are much more interesting to their audience when they act simply.

When the student actors have begun to carry out their “actions” simply, one can then introduce other procedures from Stanislavski’s technique. These include “intention” (sometimes called “objective”) and the aforementioned “given circumstances”. They might consist of “I am waiting for the return of my daughter from a night on the town” (intention), and “She is one hour late” (given circumstances). At this point the student actor has to re-enact the scene, but only using the actions previously given. Some actors who are not used to this feel horribly restricted. But they must learn restraint and not just do what they want (i.e. what they feel like), because what they think they want will not yet have been sufficiently informed by the script. Their immediate ideas as to what they feel like doing are very often not as interesting as the script. I would describe this as the actors reducing the script down to themselves rather than extending themselves up to the script. They reduce the play to their own narrow habitual world, rather than have the play stretch their world. The Alexander Technique approach of consciously deciding to dismiss an habitual reaction in preparation for something new is essential here. It lessens the fear of the unknown and it constantly helps to keep an expanding,

open attitude; an interest all the time in what has not been thought of, an ability to be still and be “taken for a walk” by the script – not by any means a passive exercise, as the “taking for a walk” game demonstrated. The actor must not anticipate how to act, in order to get directions (information) from the text.

The students are asked to play their “actions” resolutely, despite the introduction of “intention” and “given circumstances”. What happens is that the new information impinges upon their imagination, despite the fact that they are playing their “actions” resolutely. Stanislavski realised that these “actions” triggered the emotions (what he called the “inner life”) of the characters. How much the actors allow the inner impulses that get triggered to be revealed is a matter of artistic taste, but the actors must not depart from their “actions”, which become the boundaries within which they have licence.

If the actor is exclusively or even primarily trying to display the emotional or psychological state, then it usually results in a great deal of tension and self-indulgence in displaying emotions. If, instead, the actors retain the freedom in balance necessary to carry out the “actions”, they create and maintain a dynamic vehicle (themselves) through which their spontaneous imaginations can be revealed. What I believe is happening is that the inner imaginative processes galvanise the muscles of the actors because they are not *trying* (and must not try) directly to express their emotions, but are instead, as a first priority, maintaining their freedom to carry out their “actions”. There is therefore no tensional disturbance to their instrument (themselves), which is then available to convey their inner state.

Most trainee actors need repeated experience in this, because they have an overwhelming fear that they are not expressing emotion adequately. It is common for actors to think they must enter into their roles via an essentially emotional starting point. When tension is mistaken for emotion it leads to shallow, embarrassing and clichéd acting. Tension gets in the way of emotional expression – it does not facilitate emotional expression. The confidence of trainee actors grows palpably when they discover that playing an “action” triggers an appropri-

ate emotional response and relieves them from trying to generate an emotion.

All of this is carried to the next stage in the process, to where one begins to discover *why* the character does these things in these circumstances and *how* these actions help to fulfil the character's intention, by simply carrying out the "actions". The "actions" themselves are the "*what*". "How", "why", and "what" are questions that, according to Stanislavski, have to be answered during the study and rehearsal of a play. When "actions" are played in rehearsal, their motivation begins to surface. The inner state and motive of the character begins to be revealed.

"Actions" must also be logical and sequential. If one "action" doesn't give rise to the next one, then the actor either has made the wrong discovery about what the character does, or has not played it with sufficient honesty for the next action to follow logically. This method of discovery gives the actor a basis for self-criticism, and therefore independence from teachers or directors.

Eventually, when all the "actions" have been discovered, and their sequential logic tested in rehearsal, the performance itself will nearly have been arrived at. Because a sequence has been discovered, the actor can then begin to let go of the worry of how a play will turn out. (Worry seems to be part of some people's expectations, even to the extent that if they are not worried they do not think they are trying hard enough. The absence of worry has to be consciously appreciated in order to break the habit of worrying.) The actor can start by playing the first action, knowing by experience that the next will make itself clear and that no "trying to remember", with its concomitant worry, will be needed. This is also important because "trying to remember" makes most people think of the end product rather than of the process.

When actors trust the process – that "actions" trigger their behaviour on stage – it gives them confidence in their own creative responses. It gives them security and flow in their acting. It is observable that they move freely between one "action" and the next. They remain fully upright, because there is no doubt about their direction – where they are to go or what they have to do.



Learning “actions”, in the process of actor training, can certainly be done, and is done, without the Alexander Technique. However, lessons in the Technique consist of activities designed to improve one’s co-ordination, where each step of the procedure must be an end in itself, and yet logically connected to the next, so that the objective, or end product, as it were, “does itself”. When one has had such a practical experience in an Alexander lesson, it becomes second nature to think along similar lines in an acting situation.

#### **Fourth workshop: Voice**

Many actors are used to treating their voices as something separate and special – and often something that happens only from the navel upwards.

There were quite strong ideas and practices about breathing amongst the students I was working with, particularly the harmful and misguided notion that the “stomach muscles” must be employed strongly to produce a powerful breath. It is harmful because the stomach muscles cover some of the digestive organs, which do not respond well to constant pounding. It results, after many years, in a reduction of mobility in that area because of chronic contraction in those muscles. It makes it impossible to allow the free suspension of the larynx and vocal folds in the front of the neck. Over time, it restricts the free, elastic movement of the ribs and the diaphragm, and causes loss of the full capacity of, as well as correct pressure in, the lungs. It can cause malcoordination, leading to the inappropriate involvement in phonation of the ventricular folds, the correct function of which is to cover and protect the vocal folds during explosions caused by such things as coughing. It results in strained or lost voices and nodules on the vocal folds. The rationale used to justify use of the stomach muscles was that acting is an unnatural thing to do, and therefore unnatural techniques have to be employed to get voices to fill a large theatre. I have heard a similar rationale from musicians who argue that playing the oboe, trumpet, etc., is not a natural thing to do. This way of thinking is neither logical nor useful. It is natural to sit in chair? To read a book? Human beings have marvellous powers of adaptability.

By thinking in an intelligent, practical way, especially about what to avoid, in order not to harm ourselves in the process of learning and doing, we can learn extraordinary feats.

I realised that if I started by giving the students a robust vocal exercise, they would be in danger of over-straining their stomach muscles to carry it out. So I usually opted for something quieter when the classes began.

It is common that people do not ask whether a particular breathing technique actually allows them to move, let alone to immerse themselves in a rôle. From the outset I wanted the students to associate their breathing with their posture and movement, as they linked it to the “taking for a walk” exercise.

I began by asking my students to send a breath out through their noses, at the same time to remember how useful it had been to think about the poise of their heads when they were “being taken for a walk”. Having carried out their out-breaths, they were able to experience an elastic in-breath that came without any attempt to breathe in. The primary act is an out-breath (not a sniffing nor a gasping nor any kind of in-breath), followed by an elastic recoil of the ribs and diaphragm. This, causing a momentary vacuum in the lungs, allows the air to enter, preferably through the nose, to fill the vacuum. They furthermore discovered that breathing is easier when the neck muscles are not too contracted and the head therefore can balance freely.

In the next procedure we started to use our voices, albeit in a whispered form. The whispered “ah” is a common procedure in the Alexander Technique for developing correct voice production. It establishes the proper movement of the ribs and diaphragm together, and combines that with the use of the vocal folds in making sound. By following this procedure you can ensure that there is no distortion to the vocal folds by way of too much muscle contraction around the larynx, so that the air coming up can be efficiently utilized by the vocal folds. The sound that is used – “a” as in the English pronunciation of “father” – ensures that the vocal folds are at full stretch.

In the whispered “ah”, one of the most important aspects is to think of something to smile about at the beginning of the procedure.

In my experience actors are not often asked to sustain a quality of thought in the context of exercises, which are often carried out rather mechanically and thoughtlessly. Of course they are often asked to sustain a thought when they are required to know why they make an entrance on stage or when they need to know the intention they have during a scene, but not always in exercises. The need to exert their imaginations to sustain a thought that makes them smile is good training. Clearly there needs to be sustained thought in many acting situations, otherwise the muscles which carry out the thoughts are not given the proper stimulus to do so.

At this point I give actors some basic anatomy about their lungs, diaphragm, vocal cords, and so on, which I shall not go into here.

Whether one should talk about articulation in mechanical terms (what one *does* with the lips and tongue and cheeks) is questionable. The “whispered aah” contains much in it that prepares the articulators in that it stimulates stretch (undoing) in the cheeks and upper lips and in the tongue. Any activity can be more efficiently carried out if we start from an “optimal resting length” in muscles. The most complex tongue twisters can be more easily mastered when the potential for the greatest range of movement in the articulators is established and available to actors, and this is done by firstly encouraging as much opening and stretch as possible in the whole of the speech mechanism. But the use of the lips, tongue and cheeks has to be driven by the needs of the poem or play. Mechanical descriptions of articulators can result in either over- or under-articulation, as the actors try to guess how to say the words rather than learn how to respond to the words themselves.

Working with haiku poems allows actors to develop their openness and readiness to be responsive to the needs of the texts. The purpose of haikus is to capture a moment of time in such a way that, when read, the moment gets released again. This is a classic haiku:

There is a hushed sound  
Of the scarecrow fallen down  
Alone to the ground.

Haikus demand a very exact preparation because one must not anticipate how the poem will be spoken. We know from Alexander lessons how consciousness works slightly in advance of an action, so if one has started wrongly it is difficult to correct and continue. If one is not in the right frame of mind to glean information from the haikus, one has to give up and start again from the beginning. This means, however, that one uses haikus to train one's sensitivity to a most refined degree.

The outcome of this attitude, once the actors start to speak the poems, is that they begin to trust that the poem itself gives what is needed – not possible when they are already anticipating how it will sound. They soon find that they can respond quickly to the stimulus that the poem provides. The practice of not preparing or anticipating is a skill that is practised in Alexander lessons, where the habitual anticipation of performing any movement or speaking is prevented. The pupils are thus preparing themselves for unexpected possibilities. This “readiness” is maintained by sustained, inhibitory messages being sent to muscles which retain their mobility and integrity, *despite* the possibility of unexpected events. Most people stiffen when unexpected events happen.

Instead of anticipating the poem, students first remind themselves of how their breathing and voices work by repeating a whispered ‘ah’. They can then proceed to speak the first word in the poem to find out how it sounds. They should give their attention to the second word whilst their breath comes back, and then speak it (the quality of that attention would be diminished if it was necessary for the actor to think about their in-breath). Each time a new word is sounded they find out something about its meaning, sound, volume, pace and pitch. This will include the beginnings and the ends of words, and even letters within words, because in these poems the sounds of certain letters have a precise onomatopoeic value, and the poem is so short that each word is significant. They go from word to word, like walking on stepping-stones, allowing each word to inform them. This process is slow at first, but there is a richness of information and it is easily stored. The second reading gets a little faster as their responses

get re-evoked, and more is discovered. With repetition the juxtapositions of the separate words start to influence each other. This leads to unanticipated inflections and vocal noises and meanings that the actors get surprised and happy about precisely because they have not been anticipated. The actor is being trained by the poem.

In reciting a poem for the first time students sometimes under-energise the process, so that the words are not given their full value. In my experience, if the actors have followed their procedures until now, that is to say, they have prepared themselves to be ready and responsive to the poem, using their knowledge about their balance and the concomitant freedom of their necks, there is minimal faulty articulation as the performance speeds up.

If they like the poem, the stimulus to perform becomes more imperative. This itself should enliven their articulators. They might well be interested in releasing the “haiku moment”. Of course, actors will not always like the material they are given in their professional lives, but I think it important that trainee actors get enlivened, because it helps them to develop their impulses, tastes and articulation. It is therefore imperative to work with great texts.

This approach to articulation, it seems to me, satisfies principles of indirect teaching and of unity. One need not tell actors what to do, but, instead, let them find out what is needed by presenting a demand to be met. Haiku poems can be used to present oneself with a *need* for articulation (that is, the refined use of the cheeks, lips, and the tongue), and do it in such a way that one hardly notices it happening. Articulation is not introduced as a separate issue and taught directly, but is discovered as a response to the wish to realise a poem which they are inspired by. In this way actors innervate themselves from within, and the tool of articulation is where it should be – the final manifestation of, and subservient to, a process which starts from inside the actor and ends up outwards via the wish to perform.

Articulation should only take place when there is something to articulate. So the information needs to be extracted from the text to begin with. Many actors cannot, at first, give themselves permission not to know anything about the text or their performance at the

beginning of rehearsal. They have difficulty in not anticipating their performance until they have learned what it is they are supposed to be communicating. The skill of withholding the anticipation of a performance serves them well when they are performing a play, perhaps for the fiftieth time, and wish to keep it fresh, as if it is the first time they are playing it. This is explored in the following two exercises.

In the first, one takes a script and two actors. I used the scene between Shakespeare's Duke of Gloucester and Queen Anne (*Richard III* Act 1 Scene 2), because Shakespeare gives us a precise rhythm in that scene which tells us a great deal. But we are interested in not knowing too early what these rhythms signify. We want, instead, to find out if we can discover their significance and meaning whilst playing the scene, and not before. We do not even want to anticipate how the lines will be said or with what volume or force.

The actors stand some distance from each other. One holds the script and gives the first line (Gloucester's line: "Stay, you that bear the corse, and set it down") to the second actor. The second listens to the line to the end (this might seem obvious but many actors are in the habit of thinking of their reply before waiting for what is said to them to be finished). Then the second actor walks to the first actor, takes the script, and returns to his or her original position while remembering what has been said. Only then does the second actor look for their reply in the script and give it. The first actor repeats that process, and so on. (It is said that acting consists of what happens in the space between the actors, and this is a demonstration of the dramatic tension that develops whilst the listening actor walks the artificial distance to fetch the script in order to find out their reply.) Each line has to be articulated with a good degree of clarity, meaning and truth, otherwise the other is not "launched" into fetching the script. The actors are finding out how to speak their own lines by being inspired by what they hear and see from the other actor.

By the end of the scene Gloucester seems to have seduced Queen Anne, despite having recently murdered her husband. It is a scene that is particularly vulnerable to the prejudices of the actors. But actors have to learn to play what they have been given, not their preju-

dices. They have to let the script evolve a character and tell the story. When the actors rely on each other, on their own ability to respond, on the script and the dramatic tension that is created between them, the scene unfolds before their eyes. This is what all actors aspire to whenever they perform. And this is much easier when actors have practised the open-mindedness and readiness to respond which are taught in the Alexander Technique.

In a second example I use a scene from *Romeo and Juliet*, the one just before the first kiss (Act 1 Scene 5). The part leading to the first kiss is written in a sonnet form. If the actors use one script when they are rehearsing it, and if they learn thereby not to anticipate, then they are forced to give attention to the rhythm and the form of the verse, and to stay alert to what the other is saying. They will find with great accuracy the general state of the couple, how the “frisson” develops, and the exact moment when the kiss becomes inevitable, by letting the script “take them for a walk”. The actors discover they have no option but to proceed to that kiss, because of where they have been taken by the script; and that becomes delightful. They will not need to pump themselves up to find the emotion beforehand or try to “feel it” first before doing it.

As previously mentioned, it is common for actors to think they must enter into their roles via an essentially emotional starting point. This can be a great worry for trainee actors, most of whom are young and inexperienced in life. At the same time the expression of great emotion is what many actors are really interested in. It can be such a relief to actors to discover that they do not have to anticipate the emotion, and that, in fact, they are explicitly asked not to.

In all this work, the actors are trained by their texts. Their voices find subtleties of expression by the demands of the scripts. But the actors must be able to prepare themselves to be ready for anything. The same is required in mask work.

### **Fifth workshop: Mask work**

I have found that people can allow themselves to do things in a way that is outside their normal boundaries of behaviour or performance when wearing a mask.

I once gave a mask workshop at the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki. A clarinettist, who had a mask that bore a resemblance to Ronald Reagan, agreed to wear it as he played Mozart's clarinet concerto. Afterwards, he got a great reception from his fellow students, and he reported that he felt he had played the piece "as I wanted to play it, and not as I thought I ought to play it".

Additionally, working with masks teaches us the difference between putting our own preconceptions and ideas into a mask (or a role), and preparing ourselves for the information that must come from them. Once we can make such discrimination we become more self-sufficient as performers.

The first preparation, before performing (as in all the other exercises I have described) is what *not* to do – how not to anticipate what might happen. The second is how then to allow the mask to influence one's movement, posture, speech and so on.

It is very clear to an audience when the mask is giving the actor information to which the actor is responding. The masks "disappear" – that is to say, the audience forgets what the masks are made of and is instead experiencing characters. When actors are imposing their ideas on to the mask, the mask remains papier mâché to the audience and they see an actor working away behind it, separate from the mask. Masks can "disappear" even if they are fantastical or abstract – causing the audience to think they have entered an entirely imaginary world.

This requires what can best be described as a "non-doing" strategy, and it takes us to the essence of both the Alexander Technique and learning to act.

Strategies of "letting go of tension", or "relaxing", are often used by actors in their preparation for working in general, but these are "doing" strategies, in that the performers are giving direct commands to their muscles to *do* something, in this case something called "letting go of tension". When using this strategy, actors expect to be able to



feel and judge whether they are “relaxed”, and this creates uncertainties. It is difficult to be sure that one is as relaxed as one might be, or even what “relaxing” might consist of. It was demonstrated in the “taking for a walk” game that this strategy leads to a sinking of the body and to floppy muscles. In the “non-doing” strategy, no direct command to the muscles is made (you do not do anything to yourself). Instead, the first thought is to prevent interference to the body’s *innate* balance. There is less uncertainty in prevention, because you do not set out to do something, therefore there is no requirement to succeed. There is no need to make a judgement about yourself by trying to feel what you are doing.

The good thing about masks is that they are always the same – they never sink or flop or die. So the masks stimulate movements and reactions from within actors who have prepared themselves to be responsive. The masks “take them for a walk” and demand flexibility and freedom of movement from the actors if they are to follow. Even a little responsiveness to the mask confirms some freedom.

Sometimes people get worried when they have put on the masks and have responded to them. Some start to imagine that the masks are bringing up suppressed reactions from their unconscious, and they can get anxious about the stability of their emotional states. But I point out to them that they need not be worried. Since the same mask can elicit similar responses from different actors (including different actors in other parts of the world), then it must be the characteristics of the masks that elicit such responses and not their deep suppressions. Once they have understood this, actors often get very pleased and surprised with their responses. A similar worry arises because masks have long been associated with trance, and the feeling that the mask is making things happen makes the inexperienced performer feel that the mask is in control. However, the Alexander Technique gives the actor a technique for retaining self-control in meeting the unknown. It provides a deliberate, conscious strategy that removes hindrances to the freedom and spontaneity needed to improvise with the mask. In this way one can arrive at what can *look* like actors in trance, in as much as the actors are thoroughly immersed in their masks, but

which is in fact actors fully in control, voluntarily letting each unexpected moment follow the next.

I am now so used to how the masks “behave” that I take with me certain props or toys that I know a certain mask likes. Different actors in different places, wearing the same mask, sometimes choose the same prop or toy. This indicates that the actor is allowing him or herself to respond accurately to the characteristics of the mask. I think it is significant that performers become attached to their masks, talking about them as friends whose characteristics they know intimately. I also experience a sense of “old friends” reappearing, in whatever part of the world I happen to be in.

First I show the student actors how to hold their masks in such a way that the masks are “alive”. This is part of the tradition of working with masks – the concept of “respecting the mask”. If it is held badly or left lying around on the floor, the actors are constantly reminded of the material it is made of. It becomes more difficult to keep it “alive”. This being “alive” has to be judged by sensing when the masks “become” characters, thus engaging the imagination and interest, in comparison to being not “alive”, as when they just seem to be the material they are made of. This depends on the muscle tonus and attention of the actor holding the mask. The mask is not “alive” if held floppily.

Then I ask them to allow the mask to “take them for a walk” around the room, keeping the masks still (and “alive”) and in such a way that their eyes are looking into the room; in this case the mask is the “genius”. The student actors find they must remember the balance and free movement that must exist within themselves if the mask is to be allowed to be the “genius”. The mask, one can say, teaches the actor what is required. If the actors lose their sensitivity to whether or not the masks are “alive”, it indicates that they have lost their optimal innate balance and readiness – their attention, in other words. They must then recover their attention – and in this way the mask trains them in the art of attending.

The students discover something about how the mask moves in the room, what it likes to look at, or what it does not like. The stu-

dents start to embody the masks' wishes in terms of walking, running, dancing, being still and looking, creeping, hiding, etc.

Next, the actors work in pairs. One actor will hold his/her mask and the other will place their hand on their partner's back and follow their movement around the room. I have found this to be very useful when working with people who are inexperienced, or even afraid. They report that it gives them security and some certainty about their discoveries. They find they can verify new discoveries that they have made when they were without their "helper", by repeating an exercise with a "helper". The report of greater security here produced is a significant observation. This experience is not a coincidence but is due to the help they are getting in maintaining the integrity of their backs – which provide the security for their balance and therefore their *feelings* of security (something that gets further clarified in Alexander lessons).

That sense of security assists them in the important learning process of distinguishing between when they are responding to the mask and when they are imposing their own ideas upon the mask. When they begin to be sensitive to the latter, they notice it and stop. They either remove the mask and start again, or wait until their attention has recovered. A way of discovering that one is imposing ideas is that one eventually gets stuck. When responding to the mask one does not run out of ideas; the only restriction is one's capacity for taking in new information. As sensitivity sharpens, improvising with the mask starts to be easier.

An important indication that actors are responding to the genuine, and not the imposed, characteristics of their masks is that they can decide to "put on one side" any new information they might have received after an exercise. They can go away and take a break, for instance, and when they repeat the exercise later they can find that these qualities or characteristics are revealed once again. This "test" shows them that they have found truthful characteristics and have not imposed them. It strengthens their confidence in their work.

All this initial work has been done whilst just holding the mask. Now is the time to learn how to put them on their faces. I ask them

to find somewhere in the room where they can place the mask in such a way that they can leave it, go away and find it still “alive” when they come back. This is further practice in how not to “hold on” to the information gleaned from the mask up to now. Many actors are used to the practice of entering a role, and they often have their little rituals and ways and means of doing it. But many have not considered how they divest themselves of a role. Working with masks in this way can teach them that when they divest themselves of a role – forget it and walk away, as it were – it can be re-evoked more strongly the next time they take it on. This does enable them to learn that they can embody their characters (either in mask work or in their roles in a play) with greater conviction. Incidentally, using the Alexander procedure of “semi-supine” is as useful for divesting oneself of a role as it is for quietly preparing to enter one.

By this time the actors will have evolved some knowledge about how their masks move, and something about their characteristics – whether they are extrovert and quick moving, for example, or slow and deliberate, or whether they are playful or tragic, etc. These discoveries can then be used to evolve a ritual whereby the mask can be put on the face. The actors will look at the mask, wherever it is placed in the room, rather as one might look at an animal in a zoo. Just as one might with an animal, one starts to copy the mask’s facial expression or quality of stillness or movement, or even sound. In the analogy, one becomes more like the animal, until one steps, as it were, through the bars of the cage and becomes the animal. In the same way, some movements have to be found whereby the actors step up to the masks, take hold of them and put them on their faces. These movements become the actors’ “rituals”. They must not disturb the mask’s “aliveness”. Such technical details as putting elastic around the head must be kept to a minimum and the ritual can be used to sort out such small problems. There is an exact moment in the progress of the metamorphosis when the mask must be put on. When that moment arrives the transformation in the actor must be complete. Only from that point can the mask and the actor work together. Since the mask remains a fixed object – it stays the same – it is the actor who

must adapt to it. So it is the mask “taking the actor for a walk”, and dictating the performance.

If this ritual has been carried out effectively, the audience will see a character before them, and the mask (as merely a mask) will have “disappeared”. It is hard at first for inexperienced actors to sustain such an intense quality of attention, so I have found it best to ask them to carry out simple actions, such as to turn to face the centre of the room, then to turn back again. Once they have completed that task they must then perform their ritual in reverse, so as to divest themselves of their masks and place them back where they started.

More simple actions can be gradually added to this, but the rule is that the actor is learning to receive information from the mask, not to impose on it. It is better to start with that clearly in mind rather than being distracted by lots of different actions.

It is very important to learn to take off the mask properly. In a performance one might have to use several masks. It then becomes important to distinguish clearly between one character and another before going back on stage. One can be “half-way” out of one character and therefore only “half-way” into another – it ends up not being clear for the actor and therefore not clear for an audience. From now on, whenever the mask is placed on the face with the proper “ritual”, and its characteristics are rediscovered, the wearer of the mask gains more conviction in the performance, and has the confidence that more discoveries can be made. The procedure is slow at first, but it provides the actors with a clear thought process for putting on the mask in preparation for performance and for removing it once the performance is finished. Eventually the thought processes get quicker.

In Alexander procedures, exact, practical directions, or thoughts, are discovered to be essential as part of re-educating the musculature towards refinement of co-ordination. This practice helps one to understand why masks, also, need the same precision. As people get more sensitive to the masks by working with them, the need for precision becomes self-evident. When people first wear masks they often try to rush on and end up unable to remember that the information must come from the mask. Clarity of thought is lost and they begin

to impose their ideas on the masks. An actor who has had Alexander lessons often understands the need for exactitude in thought, and simplicity in instruction. When it becomes clear that this is the best way to work with the masks as well, the actors grasp the need for it more readily.

The actors soon gather a repertoire of movements and gestures. Gradually longer time can be spent with the masks on. Props and toys can be introduced. One mask can be introduced to another. The masks must continue to lead (play the “genius”) – so it can become a question as to whether one mask likes to be with another, or even whether one mask can possibly live in the same imaginary world as another. Just as in an Alexander lesson the attempt is made to assist the pupil to strengthen their individuality and broaden their volition, so it is that we try to encourage the “volition” and particular qualities of the masks.

Improvisations can follow in which the masks can play with each other, present their toys to each other, play games together and develop stories. The actors, now confident that they can play with the masks without imposing their ideas upon them, can decide to place their masks in particular circumstances to find out how they behave. When the actors have developed the self-sufficiency needed to continue to develop their own work, they will have a technique they can use to perform with any mask.

### **Sixth workshop: Clown work**

Red-nosed clowning is the most exacting of theatre skills. It demands presence of mind, quickness of thinking, adaptability, and an ability to be expansive and constructive. It also requires an atmosphere conducive to joy and laughter, and for this it demands friendliness, resilience, goodwill and magnanimity between the clowns. All these things are associated with standing at your full stature, and being able to breathe fully – everything that arises out of the Alexander lesson.

A cornerstone of the Alexander Technique is to work out the *means-whereby* something is achieved, rather than simply to try to gain what one is aiming for, thoughtlessly. The aim in clown work is, clearly, to

provoke laughter. In this, appropriate effort is vital. It simply does not work to come on stage and try hard to make an audience laugh. In any case, that inevitably involves trying something old, which is not being invented in that instant, and is always noticeable to an experienced eye that sees actors trying hard and distorting themselves. In a workshop I did with Philippe Gaulier he said to an actor who made a particularly fraught and twitchy entrance, "If you come on like that, the audience will think you are ill!" Audiences make subliminal observations as well, and they will pick up an actor's anxiety. So instead of attending to the scene and laughing, the audience would be thinking more of calling an ambulance. It is obviously more difficult to teach a trainee clown who is quite convinced that he or she is funny when they come on stage in such a way. The Alexander Technique makes you aware that what you might think you are conveying (or *trying* to convey) may not be what you do convey, due to faulty sensory awareness. Trainee clowns need to have procedures to follow during their training in order to reduce the possibility of conveying wrong information.

A basic technique in clowning is to use the energy of one thing to do another thing. I asked the students, one at a time, to come on stage and mime holding a baby, talking to it as one would to a baby. When I banged a drum, they were to switch their attention, without any pause, to the audience, and change the scene to one of telling the audience about their latest love affair, but using the same voice and energy as that they had had for speaking to the baby. The scene was not funny if the first part had not been done genuinely.

Another example is to pick up a pair of clubs as if to juggle. But instead of juggling, you run around the circus ring using the same energy – the same intention to juggle – to inform you about the way you run. The audience has to be absolutely convinced in the split second you pick up the clubs that you will juggle, and must sustain that expectation while you are running. It is funny enough to see a clown running around when the audience is expecting that the clown will juggle, but then it is even funnier when the expectation is dashed because the clown finishes running and *never* juggles. It relies on the clown finding

and maintaining a genuine intention to juggle, even though the clown knows that juggling is never going to happen.

A clown can make an entrance in a silly costume and have the audience laugh. He then goes off stage in order to repeat the entrance. This is extremely stupid and therefore very funny. But it depends on an ability to “let go of the last one” (the first entrance), in order to be able to go out and re-evoke the entrance in its entirety. Trying to repeat rather than re-evoke what one just did to make them laugh is not the same thing and does not work. This is difficult, but, again, it depends on an innocence and genuineness – qualities that are absolutely necessary for acting.

I see genuineness in acting as having the ability to receive an impulse or a wish, and to have that wish realised and manifested in physical action and expression – mind and body working together. The Alexander Technique provides the *how* in achieving this.

I have found that people who have had Alexander lessons, even those who have never set foot on stage, nor ever particularly wanted to, can carry out some of the instructions or exercises given above and give a very good account of themselves. That seems to me to be the ultimate proof of the value of the Technique for actors. The training of an actor could be speeded up with a good grounding in Alexander Technique, freeing up time for other things. A voice teacher, for example, could be freed from the daily exercise of developing the technical aspects of the vocal instrument, in favour of developing a wider repertoire.

What is more, these connections between the Technique and acting can be being made in a smallish room with a table and chair, away from the stage. When I had lessons no interference was being made with the knowledge and experience that I had already acquired about acting up to that point. My ideas of acting were not being undermined or threatened. On the contrary, those ideas were being built on. I was shown about acting without any reference being made to it at all.

This, then, is my case for stating that the table and chair work in an Alexander lesson provides all the essentials needed for acting.





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Steven Hallmark trained at LAMDA 1970-73, and at the Constructive Teaching Centre 1980-83. He has worked for the Norwegian State Theatre School, Norwegian Actors Union, “Lilleth” Theatre Group, and Scenstudium Stockholm. He has given workshops in theatre skills to Alexander teacher trainees in Denmark, England, Australia, and at the 7th International Congress of the Alexander Technique, Oxford. Hallmark is Head of Training of Stockholm Alexanderlärarutbildning (Stockholm Alexander Teacher Training).

*Drottningholmsvägen 19, itr, Stockholm, S-11242, Sweden  
+46 (0) 8 651 95 52*



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