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www.alexandertechniqueatlantic.ca/nous.asp

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Don't pass over this review thinking that there are so many books introducing the Alexander Technique, that one can't get excited at the idea of a new one. It's true the ground has been well covered—even taking into account that different people require different approaches—but I think this introduction has much of value, presented in a way that could attract people who might have felt that the Alexander Technique was perhaps a bit old-fashioned.

The authors of *The Alexander Technique: Freedom in thought and action* are Directors of the Alexander Technique Atlantic. Tasha Miller is a member of STAT and of CANSTAT and they teach together in Canada. Their book is unusual in that it came out first not as a printed volume but as a CD containing a pdf with the twelve chapters which you print off for yourself. For those who prefer a book in the hand, they followed this up with a print version that is very nicely presented (though I am sure I am not the only reader who would be grateful for an index in the reprint).

Freedom in thought and action is aimed at the general public, and describes aspects of the Alexander Technique, who can use it, who can benefit, Alexander's background and the scientific context. Nothing especially new or startling here but the text is clear and intelligent and a pleasure to read even if you are a seasoned teacher. It doesn't talk down, nor does it have that sickly persuasiveness that characterises so many self-help books, including some Alexander volumes. There are some parts (some rather strung-out analogies, for example) that are a bit heavy-handed—but these, I would guess, are the result of too much reworking.

I liked this robust text, and its well-chosen illustrations—which include the sublime strip by Schultz on 'getting the most out of the depressed stance'. The pictures are great on the CD, and the pdfs print out well, but it would

*The Alexander Technique:
 Freedom in thought and action*

Tasha Miller & David Langstroth

Nous Publishing (Halifax 2006)
 Hyperlinked, searchable digital
 book. 129pp with b&w and colour
 illustrations
 CAD \$20 plus p&p ISBN 0-973-
 97860-0.

Nous Publishing (Halifax 2007)
 Paperback 151pp
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*Freedom in thought and action exemplified
by Jeanne Day in the Scottish mountains*

have been better, perhaps, to have had them rescanned at higher resolution for the printed book, to get rid of dottiness. There is some variation between the book and the CD: for example, you get a portrait of Magnus on the CD while in the book you have one of Coghill.

The pictures themselves are relevant and well-chosen, and they contribute to an understanding of the text. An advantage of the CD version is that each of the endnote numbers has a neat hyperlink to its note and another that takes you back directly from note to text. The absence of an index also matters less because you can type in a key word and find all occurrences.

The content, if not new, is presented in a fresh and contemporary style which does not compromise the content. Primary Control, the element of the Technique most often shirked by authors, has a chapter to itself which quotes in full Alexander's most comprehensive definition:

A certain use of the head in relation to the neck, and of the head and neck in relation to the torso and other parts of the organism, if consciously and continuously employed, ensures ... that 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.¹

The authors recap on how the Primary Control relates to the work of Magnus and of Coghill (though not of Charles Sherrington). There are some interesting references to parallel observations in medical science, including the still-relevant 1968 paper by neurophysiologists Whatmore and Kohli, which noted that excessive effort is related to a large number of diseases and health problems.

The authors dwell rather on psychoanalysis, depending, possibly too much, on Webster's *Why Freud was Wrong*.² However, their comparison of the Freudian unconscious and Alexander's adjectival use of the word is useful. They also point out that in *Man's Supreme Inheritance*, Alexander explicitly dismissed 'the fallacy of assuming an entity for the subconscious self'³ because he perceived human behaviour to be the product of conscious and unconscious actions of a self which always acts as a whole.

In the last chapter, the authors return to the title of the book and examine what 'freedom in thought and action' might entail. It is a thoughtful conclusion and only occasionally marred by inappropriate choice of word as when they assert that we are born 'with the ability to stop, think and make a choice ...' when actually we have the *potential* rather than the *ability* and this important aspect of life is something gradually learned rather than innate. Such lapses are, however, few and even if you disagree with some of what the authors say, they present their case well and it is a pleasure to engage with them. Every so often, perhaps, there needs to be an Alexander book for our times, which adds to the canon rather than superseding the old faithfuls.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Alexander, F.M. *The Universal Constant in Living* 2nd edition (London: Chaterson 1934) p7
- 2 Webster, R. *Why Freud was Wrong* (London: Fontana 1996)
- 3 Alexander, F.M. *Man's Supreme Inheritance* 2nd edition (London: Chaterson 1946) chapter VI