CONNECTED LIVES

PART TWO: MARGARET NAUMBURG AND THE ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE

Image courtesy of Ruth Diamond

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Abstract

This is the second in a series of articles exploring the lives of a small group of women who played pivotal roles in the events leading to the birth of the American Center for the Alexander Technique (ACAT). The first article in this series ["Connected Lives," *AmSAT Journal* No.17 (Fall 2020)] was devoted to Ethel Webb, who taught on Alexander's practice in New York from 1914 to 1922 and participated in the training of Frank Pierce Jones. This piece centers on Margaret Naumburg, an American psychologist who brought Alexander to America, introduced him to John Dewey, and began a train of events that led to the founding of ACAT.

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Margaret Naumburg 1890–1983

> A fighter … against the inevitable resistance to new ideas and concepts
> – Thomas Frank
> …With dark luminous eyes that wanted to change the world
> – Waldo Frank

With the exception of Frank Pierce Jones, the American effort to promote the Alexander Technique was initiated and led by women. Musicians, teachers, immigrants, progressives, and rebels, they came from backgrounds that were nothing like those of the first-generation teachers who framed the way the Technique was seen and taught in England.

In Australia, F.M. Alexander had worked first with actors and then with individuals sent by doctors, particularly those with breathing problems. When he traveled from Australia to London he was armed with letters of recommendation from a prominent Australian surgeon and from 1904 to 1914, much of his support and prestige came from within the London medical community (Bloch 2004, 49–63). But then in 1914, Margaret Naumburg invited Alexander to New York where he met John Dewey, women from the progressive education movement, and members of New York's bohemian art world. By introducing the Technique to these new communities, Naumburg initiated a sequence of events that led to a broadened understanding of the Technique and opened pathways for new ways of teaching the Technique in the United States.

Naumburg had two ground-breaking careers: first as a leader in progressive education and later, as one of the creators of art therapy in the United States. Over the course of many decades, she explored a wide range of approaches to embodied learning and therapy, seeking to bypass the traps of language and conceptual thinking. Her methods involved the use of music, dancing, and the visual arts in the classroom, and she was the first known educator to apply ideas from psychoanalytic theory to classroom teaching.

As a young woman just out of college, Naumburg learned from Ethel Webb about Alexander's work while attending the First International Montessori Training Course in Rome in 1913. She was intrigued. Perhaps there was a way to help children let go of unhealthy habits of mind and body. She decided to take a course of lessons with F.M. Alexander in London. The lessons left a lasting impression on her. There was a practical way of teaching children after all. She wrote later that it was futile to treat "bodily symptoms as isolated conditions of disease instead of manifestations of maladjustment throughout the organism" (Naumburg 1928, 261).

Hoping to find a way to bring the Technique into American elementary schools, Naumburg introduced Alexander to prominent New York artists, musicians, and educators, including the influential progressive educator, Lucy Sprague Mitchell. Through these connections, the possibility of the Alexander Technique being introduced to schools throughout New York City became a very real possibility.

But when Alexander visited these experimental schools, he was not impressed by what he saw. In the 1918 edition of *Man's Supreme Inheritance (MSI)*, he devoted the better part of a chapter criticizing them. By 1924, the Alexander Technique had lost its chance of entering New York elementary schools and the connection that Naumburg had recognized and nurtured fell apart. She had been drawn to the fact that a method of conscious self-control could benefit the increased creativity of progressive education. But Alexander's negative reaction to these schools' methods may have lost the world that opportunity.

Although Naumburg's plans didn't go as she had hoped, she did include the Technique in the curriculum of the Walden School, a school she later founded. This opened the door to a wider exploration of the Technique's relevance to education. One teacher at Walden, Alma Frank, later gave lessons to pianist Henriette Michelson, who was then instrumental in spreading interest in the Technique within the music department at Juilliard. Michelson also encouraged Judy Liebowitz to take lessons with Alma Frank. Eventually Liebowitz was invited to teach in the Drama Department at Juilliard, which ultimately led to the creation of ACAT.

The neighborhood

Margaret Naumburg was born in 1890 and grew up in a wealthy German Jewish family that resided in uptown Manhattan, just as one of its neighborhoods, Morningside Heights, was emerging as a new center for intellectual and artistic life in New York City. For most of the nineteenth century, the area had been a sprawling, rural outpost, where a scattering of large wealthy estates coexisted

with the Bloomingdale Insane Asylum, orphanages, and ramshackle shantytowns. Then, in 1879, the city's first subway line was completed on 9th Avenue (now Columbus Avenue), followed by the construction of a beautiful new park alongside winding, tree-lined Riverside Drive. Before long, wealthy German Jews were flocking north to live in the new mansions along West End Avenue and Riverside Drive.

By 1890, Morningside Heights was home to a vibrant community of artists, intellectuals, businessmen, and mobsters. Shortly after Margaret's birth, Columbia University moved from the east side of Manhattan to Broadway and 116th Street. A few years later, Naumburg's future alma mater, Barnard College, also moved to a new location—a couple of blocks north of Columbia. Then in 1898, Teacher's College relocated uptown and affiliated with Columbia University. At the suggestion of Wendell T. Bush, the scholar and wealthy industrialist who would later become one of Alexander's most influential students, the philosopher and educator John Dewey was chosen to be the first president of Teacher's College, Columbia University (Columbia University 2018). As the neighborhood continued to lure academic and religious institutions away from the expensive and overdeveloped East Side of Manhattan, Union Theological Seminary moved to the northern end of Morningside Heights, followed by the Institute of Musical Art (IMA), which would later become The Juilliard School. Although the IMA was only five years old, it was a highly respected music conservatory, modelled after the great European conservatories. One of its original teachers was pianist Henriette Michelson, who, more than 30 years later, would introduce Judy Leibowitz to the Alexander Technique.

The family

Naumburg's mother ran her household according to the dictates of a world that was vividly described in Stephen Birmingham's bestselling book *Our Crowd*. It was a closed society, "governed by obedience and traditions …where life was scheduled for the proper thing at the proper moment," and where a woman "did not do bead-work when embroidery was fashionable" (Birmingham 1966, 10). Some women in this set, like Betty Loeb, who helped found Juilliard, flaunted the rules or pushed them to the limit, but Therese Naumburg toed the line. Little is known of Therese's early life except for a few unhappy details: she was the eighth of nine children; she was born in Wilmington, North Carolina shortly after her parents emigrated from Germany; and her father died when she was nine years old (Geni 2009). Therese, a young Jewish woman born in the deep South to immigrant parents who could not yet speak English, learned to fit in with her husband's wealthy German-Jewish New York crowd. But the rules and traditions of this culture did not suit the needs of her three rebellious daughters. As a teenager, Margaret wrote, "In order to avoid criticism, do nothing, say nothing, be nothing" in dark letters on her bedroom wall (Naumburg, n.d.) Her sister remembered how "[y]outhful efforts at creation were laughed at or brushed aside or even swept out with the rubbish as merely interfering with the order and cleanliness of a well-kept house" (Hinitz 2002, 37). Raised in an extended family of highly successful men, these young women sought their own freedom and recognition.

There was, of course, the other side of the family. Naumburg's father, Max, was part of a progressive and close-knit extended family of bankers, philanthropists, and musicians. Most of the Naumburg ancestors came from the same small Bavarian village known for its ornate Italian castle and a long line of talented Jewish musicians dating back to the seventeenth century. Some of them were cantors, while others were secular performers and composers. Their talents were so remarkable that even before Bavarian Jews were liberated from their ghettos by the emancipation edict in 1813, Naumburg family musicians were crisscrossing Europe to perform in musical events alongside Christian performers. The most famous of these musicians was Samuel Naumbourg, who became

the cantor for the Synagogue Rue Notre-Dame-de-Nazareth in Paris, where he composed liturgical music that is still performed in Jewish synagogue services today (Singer and Kahn 1906).
Increased freedom and mobility awakened a yearning for assimilation within the larger community around them. Max's father, Lazarus (Louis) Naumburg, joined the Reform Jewish movement, which emphasized universal, ethical, and spiritual values more than ritual observance. In 1848, Louis moved his family from Bavaria to Pennsylvania, where he served as Cantor at Congregation Keneseth Israel in Philadelphia, and later served at Congregation Rodef Shalom in Pittsburgh, which was known for its political activism and abolitionist history (Adler 1906).
After coming to America, the family continued its quest for cultural assimilation, education, spiritual identity, and music. The Naumburg name is woven into the history of twentieth-century American music—Naumburg family members helped to finance Juilliard, created the Naumburg Prize, funded the Naumburg Bandshell in Central Park, and organized a series of free classical concerts there that continue to this day. Margaret's cousin, Walter W. Naumburg, was a talented musician who played the cello at Harvard with Juilliard founder James Loeb. Walter's father, Elkan Naumburg, was a passionate promoter of music in New York and the Naumburg home was the scene of weekly chamber music sessions featuring noted musicians. Leopold Damrosch and Theodore Thomas, the two great rival conductors of the day, were regulars, as was Marcella Sembrich, the Metropolitan Opera's leading soprano. Damrosch played first violin and conducted the Oratorio Society of New York, which was organized in the Naumburg parlor. Committed to making classical music accessible to all and to creating American training conservatories, Elkan Naumburg was a major financial contributor of the IMA, and he provided the funding for the Naumburg Bandshell in Central Park in 1862 as a place for classical concerts. One hundred and sixty years later, the bandshell has been the site of some of New York's most important artistic and cultural events (Wikipedia 2020). In 1987, the Naumburg Orchestra paid tribute to the extraordinary relationship between these families and the cultural life of New York by performing a program of Telemann, Haydn, Bach, and Mozart at Lincoln Center's Damrosch Park (*New York Times*, Aug. 4, 1987).

Childhood matters

Growing up in the shadow of two clever older sisters, Margaret Naumburg was hungry for recognition and for the kind of creative outlets that her mother could not or would not give to her. The contrast between the rich opportunities that were open to Naumburg sons and the rigidly controlled lives of Naumburg daughters is a stark reminder of women's positions in the early twentieth century, even for girls born into a wealthy, progressive family in one of the most liberal cities in the world.
Neither elementary school nor high school offered any relief from the repressive atmosphere at home. Naumburg hated "the hard wooden benches, the rigid posture, often hands behind the back, and the enforced silence of school periods. The overactive, dominant, shrill teacher, and the meek and intimidated children. I still recall the relief when gongs rang and there was a break from the silent tension for lunch and the playground." Sitting still was torture but methods of teaching were even worse. "The monotony of learning arithmetic and learning to read was broken by learning to sing scales to the teacher's pitch pipe. Art meant drawing cubes and pyramids." (Naumburg, n.d., 6).
Over the course of her childhood, Margaret attended several public and private schools, including the Horace Mann School on 120th Street, founded in 1897 by Nicholas Murray Butler as an experimental unit of Teacher's College. But she was unhappy at all of them. After her death, Margaret's son Thomas Frank speculated that "feeling both misunderstood and without opportu-

nity to share her inner life during these early years gave her a beginning motivation to battle for less restrictive educational approaches focused on the individual child's emotional needs" (Detre 1983, 113). Those painful memories of sitting rigidly still on those hard wooden benches must have influenced her decision to include the Alexander Technique, Bentley Dance movements, and Dalcroze Eurhythmics years later in the Walden School curriculum.

College years

After high school, Naumburg spent a year at Vassar before transferring to the more liberal Barnard College, where she roomed with John Dewey's daughter, Evelyn. Young Evelyn Dewey had already distinguished herself as an advocate for women rights and educational reform. One of 20,000 women marching on picket lines to support the groundbreaking 1909 Triangle Shirtwaist workers' strike, Dewey was also the Secretary-Treasurer of the College Settlements Association and the President of the Barnard Chapter of the Collegiate Equal Suffrage League of New York (Staring 2014, 22).

Like her mother Alice, Evelyn Dewey made significant, unrecognized contributions to John Dewey's pedagogical theories. Soon after graduating from Barnard, she teamed up with her father to write *Schools of Tomorrow*, which was a survey of experimental schools all over the country. "Evelyn did all the field research, visiting schools and interviewing parents, teachers, administrators, and students; and she wrote most of the book's sections involving observation. She visited and observed the best—or sometimes simply the best-known—experimental schools in the nation, showing how they applied various educational theories, by Rousseau, Herbart, Froebel, Pestalozzi—and Dewey" (Staring 2014, 21).

At Barnard, Naumburg gravitated toward a group of students known to the local press as "militant suffragists and socialists" (*New York Herald* 1911). She was elected president of the campus Socialist Club and became active in New York's social reform movement. She formed a close, lifelong friendship with the socialist journalist and political writer Walter Lippmann, who introduced her to Claire Raphael, a young pianist who had studied under Frank Damrosch at the IMA. The two women were drawn together by their common family backgrounds, love of music, and openness to new ideas. Finding most of her classes "trying and stultifying," (Reis 1955, 21) Raphael had recently dropped out of the IMA and had started a chamber quartet with the music critic Walter Kramer and a young political writer and cellist named Waldo Frank (Reis 1955, 21). As Raphael became increasingly interested in the intersection of music, educational theory, and human rights, she began teaching music to children in a Lower East Side settlement house and organizing free concerts in New York City's public schools. Within a few years, Margaret's friendship with Claire Raphael would prove enormously helpful to F.M. Alexander when he came to New York at the start of World War I. By then, Raphael had married the industrialist Arthur Reis, who became one of F.M's most influential American students.

Moving away from Reform Judaism, Naumburg joined the New York Ethical Culture Society, which had been founded by Rabbi Felix Adler in the late nineteenth century as a way to ground religion in universally verifiable ethical precepts. Combining spiritual worship and educational reform, Adler wrote that, "the ideal of the school is … to train reformers" (Beck 1958, 8). Frank Damrosch, the society's organist, had recently been selected by James Loeb to start the IMA (later Juilliard) for the purpose of creating an American conservatory that would rival the great European conservatories.

In a book that anticipated some of Alexander's ideas, Damrosch argued that children should not be allowed to start playing a single note of music until they had developed the necessary mental, physical, and sensory skills. The book, *Some Essentials In the Training of Music*, outlined specific procedures for teaching those skills, including teaching a child to inhibit the desire to play a piece of music until they had developed the "faculties required for the proper apprehension of an

expression" (Damrosch 1916, 5). Damrosch laid out a precise pedagogical method for integrating the mind, the senses, and the emotions in teaching a child how to experience and express musical compositions. In his book, Damrosch paid as much attention to the art of teaching as he did to the art of musical expression. and in some ways, he mirrored Montessori when he articulated his principles for teaching music. "Cultivate the faculties in their natural order… Lead the child to discover for himself. …Proceed from the known to the unknown… Imagine that each point of knowledge, or the ability to do …is a step which the child mounts, and which prepares and places the next step" (Damrosch 1916, 14–17). Naumburg knew Damrosch from childhood musical Sundays in her uncle's parlor, and it is possible that she met Henriette Michelson in those days, too, since Michelson taught under Damrosch at the IMA and might have attended the informal afternoon concerts at the Naumburg and Loeb homes.

Though she was very interested in educational reform, Naumburg did not believe that there were practical solutions for changing the way the educational system worked. Furthermore, as a budding feminist, she rejected the idea of being forced into a "woman's profession." Her feelings about this reflected the general sentiment at Barnard at the time, where the college administrators saw the women students at Teacher's College, Columbia University as narrowly educated technicians (Weneck 1991, 14–15). Rejecting education as a major, Margaret turned to economics and psychology. Psychology was a new department and not totally accepted at the college, a point that had to have appealed strongly to the rebellious Naumburg. It had been founded by Harry L. Hollingworth and "the first courses …were offered in 1906 over the strenuous objections of many faculty and administrators who maintained that Psychology was not a fitting topic for young women" (Barnard College Psychology Department, n.d.).

Hollingworth's emphasis was on applied research, but while she was at Barnard, Naumburg read one of the first papers published in the United States describing Freudian psychoanalytic theory. Always attracted to new and exciting ideas, she was captivated by Freud's concepts, but she did not pursue her interest any further. "I did not realize, as yet, how deeply this psychoanalytic approach to the unconscious had won a response in my own unconscious," she wrote later (Naumburg, n.d.). As the years went by, Naumburg would come to place more and more importance on the benefits of encouraging free exploration of unconscious impulses without the filter of conscious control. This would lead to a serious split between Naumburg's approach to education and Alexander's theory and practice.

Barnard had a strong economics department, which included several Columbia University professors and one of its own graduates, Emilie Hutchinson, a feminist who later published several books on women's wages and their experiences in PhD programs (Hutchinson 1938). Pursuing a political approach to reform, Naumburg applied to Sidney Webb's graduate seminar at the London School of Economics, starting in the fall of 1912. She probably learned about the seminar from her socialist friend, Walter Lippmann, who had studied Webb's work in a class on government as a student at Harvard. The seminar offered the exciting prospect of a semester spent doing *hands-on* work to improve wages and benefits in the brand-new British cinematography industry (Naumburg, n.d.)

While double-majoring in economics and psychology, Naumburg continued taking education classes with John Dewey. Dewey's belief that "the old model of schooling—students sitting in rows, memorizing and reciting—was antiquated" validated Naumburg's painful memories of school (Gibbons 2019). Dewey believed that "students should be active, not passive. They required compelling and relevant projects, not lectures. Students should become problem solvers. Interest, not fear, should be used to motivate them. They should cooperate, not compete" (Gibbons 2019). Meaningful knowledge arises out of real-life experiences, which have a personal meaning to the individual student. When real-life experience shifts our understanding of the world, we experience an "aha" moment that changes us forever. Rather than trying to pre-determine the outcome of any

learning experience, the teacher organizes the content of the experience based on the student's capacity to process the material. The quality of a learning experience is judged by the students' ability to apply newly acquired knowledge to future situations (Gibbons 2019). As an ardent individualist, Naumburg was less impressed with Dewey's belief that education was a social, communal process necessary for turning children into good citizens in a democracy (Gibbons 2019). For Naumburg, education's goal was always fostering individual creativity and growth.

During her junior year at Barnard, Naumburg read an article in *McClure* Magazine that described a new method of teaching that had been developed by Italy's first female doctor, Maria Montessori. Before starting her school at the Casa Bambini (House of Children) in 1907, Montessori took courses in pedagogical pathology and educational philosophy at the University of Rome, concentrating in particular on the writing of William James and Friedrich Froebel. However, the program she designed was experimental in nature. Montessori gradually discarded traditional furniture and schedules; her educational program took on the distinctive aspects of a modern-day Montessori classroom with child-sized furniture and free access to activities. Her method was sensory, developmental, and self-directed. In addition to the traditional five senses, she defined a sixth sense that comes close to Alexander's definition of kinesthesia. She called this the "stereognostic sense," which "combines tactile and muscular senses." She wrote that while this sense is "much debated among psychologists …our pedological experience…confirms the existence of a muscular sense and the possibility of educating it" (Montessori 2013, 208).

Building on the theories of Jean Piaget, Erikson, and other developmental psychologists, Montessori identified "sensitive periods" during a child's life when the child would be most open to developing particular skills. Based on this, she developed a progression of experiences organized in a spiral fashion, so that the same concepts were explored with new materials as the child became able to integrate more complex skills and concepts. In this method, the teacher is asked to inhibit the urge to control the lesson and to trust that if students choose their own activities "children will take care of their deep-seeded needs for independence and self-control, as well as other needs such as order and silence, and will learn how to monitor their own behavior" (Thayer-Bacon 2012, 8). The Montessori teacher sets up the materials and the "game," only intervening if something goes wrong. "Essentially, Montessori was a social revolutionary who believed that the individual's transformation originates in an appropriate environment, and societal transformations originate with the individual." (Shortridge 2007, 39).

During the twentieth century, Montessori's concept of the spiral curriculum was incorporated into many educational programs in the United States, including Judy Leibowitz's course at Juilliard and her ACAT curriculum. The question of how much and what kind of correctional intervention children need as they guide their own learning was an issue addressed by Alexander in his first book, Man's Supreme Inheritance. "I would only insist that the children of today, born as they are with very feeble powers of instinctive control, absolutely require certain definite instructions by which to guide themselves before they can be left to free activity. And these directions must be based on a principle that will help the child to employ his various mechanisms to the best advantage in his daily activities" (Alexander 2002, 83). In contrast, as the years went by, Naumburg placed more and more importance on the benefits of encouraging free exploration of unconscious impulses without the filter of conscious control.

Europe

During the summer of 1912, after graduating from Barnard and before starting the Webb seminar, Margaret and her mother toured Europe, stopping in Rome to meet Maria Montessori and observe her teaching. Enthralled by Montessori's work and her personal charisma, Naumburg

wrote enthusiastically:

> I meant to tell you that a week or so ago I wrote to my twin nieces for their second birthday, and as the best wish I knew, I hoped they would be brought up the Montessori way. Even then I scarcely realized what a splendid wish it was, for I had not talked with you or seen the children!
>
> You told me many of the excitable children slept more calmly after a few weeks at the school. Am I too big to say that I slept better last night for having been with you yesterday? If your book made me wish that I could study with you, you yourself have so strengthened that desire, that it will not be my fault if I do not come back to you soon. Would you and the children take these flowers with all my love? (Staring 2014a, 2)

Naumburg spent the fall of 1912 at the Webb seminar, working to improve wages and benefits in the British cinematography industry. At the end of the semester, Naumburg sent her parents an enthusiastic letter saying that "these three months in London, including the work and the people, meant more to me than my four years of college" (Naumburg, n.d.). The graduate program was scheduled to last a year but, unable to resist the lure of being a part of something brand new and revolutionary, Margaret Naumburg left London in January to attend the First International Montessori teacher's training course.

Montessori Training

In January of 1913, the First International Montessori Training opened with a lavish ceremony followed by a gala ball. Three-quarters of the ninety foreign students were American. An elated Naumburg wrote to her parents that she felt "quite sure it's the chance of a lifetime to be able to get into this work when it is still just at the start" (Bloch 2004, 95). In that same letter, dated February 3, she mentioned a Mardi Gras celebration "with two very nice English girls." The two "girls" were Ethel Webb and Irene Tasker. Tasker remembered the meeting this way: "I went out to Rome in 1912 to study with Dr. Montessori and in early 1913 was joined by Ethel Webb who had already started working with F.M. [Alexander]. I thought there was an educational connection to be made between his work and that of Montessori. In Rome we both made the acquaintance of Miss Naumburg, an American, who was studying with Montessori and was herself a pupil of Dewey's and friend of his family" (Tasker 1978, 11). Webb had brought along a copy of Alexander's new book, *Conscious Control*, which was later incorporated into the second edition of *Man's Supreme Inheritance*, and both Tasker and Naumburg were impressed enough to want lessons. There is no record of Naumburg's reaction to the book, but Tasker was struck by the similarity between Montessori's use of small, structured experiences as steps in a process of mastering a larger skill and Alexander's concept of the "means whereby" (Tasker 1978, 6).

Sometime during the training, Naumburg had a personal falling out with Montessori. Naumburg wrote, "I saw a good deal of her personally in the first part of the course. Later in the term when she took me for a drive with her, she asked me why I had withdrawn from her and I told her the truth. That I found her authoritarian in imposing her ideas and was not concerned with accepting everything she said without question" (Naumburg, n.d.). It is not clear what actually happened, but given the personalities of these two strong-willed women, it seems inevitable that Naumburg's early infatuation with Dr. Montessori would wear thin over time. Nevertheless, Naumburg continued to believe in the Montessori method as a basic way for structuring a classroom and used the method as the core component of her schools. For the rest of her life she followed Montessori's

stated goal for every teacher. “The greatest sign of success for a teacher...is to be able to say, ‘The children are now working as if I did not exist’” (Montessori 1949, 283).

Alexander lessons in London

In the summer of 1913, Naumburg took lessons with Alexander in London, while Claire Raphael enrolled in classes in the Dalcroze method of Eurhythmics and attended T. H. Yorke Trotter’s “Rhythmic Method of Teaching Music” classes at the London Conservatory of Music (Thomas 1991, 30). Naumburg was so impressed with Alexander’s work that she promised to set him up in practice if he would come to New York. She hoped to introduce his ideas to American progressive educators and to integrate his work into American elementary education (Bloch 2004, 98–101). She also wanted him to meet John Dewey because of the similarities she noticed between Alexander’s work and Dewey’s writing. She encouraged Alexander to read Dewey’s work: “[H]owever, in a 1957 letter to Eric David McCormack she said that she did not notice Alexander taking an interest in Dewey’s books or those of anyone else” (Hinitz, 2013, 188).

While Naumburg did not leave a written record of her lessons, the following fictional dialogue between a director of a children’s school and an English professor in her 1928 book *The Child and the World* reflects her understanding of the work. The professor’s problem will sound familiar to anyone who is familiar with Alexander’s own story of how he came create to the Technique. The director has just told the professor that she can tell from the way he holds his head that he has problems with his voice and his eyes.

> PROFESSOR.
> Do you mean to say that you could tell by watching my movements that I have trouble with my speaking voice?
> DIRECTOR. Yes.
> PROFESSOR.
> At certain times my voice gives out completely. Just when I want to give my most important lectures, of course.
> DIRECTOR. And you have tried all the throat specialists?
> PROFESSOR.
> Oh, yes.
> DIRECTOR. But they don’t cure it?
> PROFESSOR.
> No. I rest as they advise, and then of course some of the hoarseness clears up. Their treatments are no more than a partial and temporary help. But I don’t see how you could tell that I have this difficulty with my speaking voice. It’s in perfectly good shape at present.
> DIRECTOR. Well, I could tell just as clearly from the way you misuse your neck, shoulder, and throat muscles that your voice as well as your eyes are not under your control. I could tell by your original response that you were politely skeptical of my diagnosis that strain was wrong muscle-tension and not organic defect.
> PROFESSOR.
> That’s true. I thought you were perhaps assuming too much. But the way you spotted the strain in my voice forces me to stop and reconsider. I suddenly realize how attached I am also to habitual methods of treating bodily symptoms as isolated conditions of disease instead of as manifestations of maladjustment throughout the organism.
> DIRECTOR. Even though you had previously agreed in theory that the mechanism

ought to be dealt with as a whole?
PROFESSOR.
Yes. But I still don't see how you arrive at any concrete technique for that purpose.
DIRECTOR. But no one can consider any of the techniques available for basic readjustments of physical, emotional, or mental mechanisms with serious attention until he is convinced of the failure of other methods to deal with fundamental human orientation. I mean that one can't be concerned with such methods until one has run up a blind alley in one's own work or life. Arrived at the point of despair, one may then seek out new techniques that are off the beaten track. (Naumburg 1928, 261)

Rather than recommending the Alexander Technique to the professor, the director suggests that he try one of a wide range of mind-body techniques. This was consistent with Naumburg's and Raphael's inclusive and eclectic approach to education. In a 1915 interview for the *New York Tribune*, Raphael said, "I was amazed at first to find that Dr. Montessori did so little work with sound in her sense training. Then...I realized that no one genius can possibly construct a complete system of education" (Rodman 1916). Building on this, Naumburg added, "[We] have accepted Dr Montessori's work with keen appreciation of its great value…and we have added to it what we have learned from other great teachers, from Froebel and Dalcroze, and Miss Bentley, and most recently from Mr. Matthias Alexander, of London" (Staring 2014b, 6).
Although Naumburg never published anything else about the Technique, her gift for synthesizing Alexander's concepts with her theory and practice can be seen in an unpublished note about pedagogy. She wrote:

If school as grownups are so fond of saying "is a preparation for life"—then they must make a child understand that phrase—make a child understand that finishing a fourth reader or a set of algebra problems is not just an end in itself—but a means for facing life. But in America the result, always the result, the finished product is the goal. We are in such a hurry to arrive, that the joy of doing is lost. This is as true of our education as of our skyscrapers. … We are in such haste to see or get a result, that we neglect the steps by which to reach the goal. … We all know it is easier to help a child than to teach it to help itself. Yet any child will take a natural pride in thinking & acting alone if the grownups will only permit it. (Gutek 2020, 263)

While she didn't use Alexander's terms "means whereby" or "end gaining," she had clearly absorbed these concepts and incorporated them into her teaching.

Intrigued by Raphael's description of Dalcroze Eurhythmics, Naumburg signed up for classes. Dalcroze chose the name Eurhythmics—the Greek word for *good rhythm*—for his method of building musical skill by activating the innate rhythmical connections between our brains, our nerve pathways, and our muscles (Schnebly-Black 2004, 38). He devised a series of full-body movement and musical exercises intended to awaken four interrelated skills: the sense of rhythm, the ability to hear and accurately reproduce sounds (*solfège*), spontaneity, and kinesthetic awareness. Dalcroze's developmentally-sequenced lessons were designed to teach the whole body to hear and respond to music. As he worked with students, he became convinced that these musical skills expanded his students' capacity for every kind of learning. Naumburg explained this in a 1914 article published in the magazine *Outlook*: "The Dalcroze Method of Rhythmic Gymnastics was originally evolved as a special training for musicians. But the scope of the method when applied to children turned out to be far wider than had been foreseen. It became a method of education, developing physical poise, attention, and a new susceptibility to beauty of form and sound" by "bringing out the inner sense of rhythm that all people have hidden within them."

(Naumburg 1914, 127–9).

An interview a few years later explained how Raphael incorporated Dalcroze concepts and methods into music lessons: "Miss Raphael has had musical instruments of one scale made for the children. The piano, she says, is too complicated for little folk. She encourages the children to make melodies, to find the tones on their musical bars, to clap rhythms and sing and dance. 'These youngsters learn to think music before they learn to play,' said Miss Raphael" Gutek 2020, 264).

Greenwich village

Shortly after returning to America, Naumburg moved to Greenwich Village with Waldo Frank; they were part of a circle of avant-garde artists and writers that included Sherwood Anderson, Hart Crane, Georgia O'Keefe, Paul Rosenfeld, and Alfred Stieglitz (Hinitz 2013, 181). Half a decade before women got the vote, with most professions still closed to women, the Village was one of the few places in the United States where women could openly defy conventions by exploring nontraditional forms of femininity. These early feminists were united by a common belief that women could form supportive networks in order to achieve their professional, social, and political goals. Tolerance ruled and every kind of personal relationship was accepted, from conventional marriage to homoeroticism (Schwartz 1986, iv-v). Until 1916, Naumburg and Frank lived together, unmarried and engaging in open relationships with other people. But, after opening the Walden School, Naumburg decided that they should marry for professional reasons (Altman 2009).

Waldo Frank was establishing himself as a novelist, historian, political activist, and literary critic. Working as a freelancer while finishing his first published novel, *The Unwelcome Man*, Frank was part of a group of young radical writers that included the essayist Randolph Bourne, the historian Lewis Mumford, the poet James Oppenheim, and the Harlem Renaissance novelist Jean Toomer, who would later become Naumburg's lover. Several members of this group, including Jean Toomer and Randolph Bourne, took lessons with Alexander, as did members of Dewey's circle at Columbia; some of these students later wrote warring reviews of *MSI* (Bloch 2004, 103). Reviews by Columbia professors, including art historians Richard Morse Hodge and James Harvey Robinson, were highly favorable—while Bourne, a former student but later a critic of Dewey, as well as other New York intellectuals were highly critical of Alexander's chapters on eugenics, race, progressive education, and the arts (Staring 2015, 9–10).

Naumburg and Raphael were busy building a female support network for the new Montessori-based school they hoped to open. Naumburg's old friend Lippman introduced her to Mabel Dodge, who conducted a Wednesday night salon at her Fifth Avenue apartment where New York's leading intellectuals, activists, and artists argued about everything from anarchy to modern art to psychoanalysis. Dodge was an original member of the Heterodoxy Club, which served as a forum for feminist women in the arts, education, and healthcare. Fanny Hurst spoke at the Heterodoxy Club, as did Emma Goldman, Helen Keller, and Margaret Sanger. The name "Heterodoxy" announced to the world that it was a safe place for women to question the cultural norms imposed on them in their homes, their jobs, and their sexuality. The group members served as a collaborative resource for financial support and professional contacts. Interested in immigrant rights, many of the women in the club worked at the settlement houses in New York. Meetings and lectures were open to the general community. While there is no evidence that Naumburg ever officially joined the club, she was well-acquainted with many of its members, including America's first Jungian analyst, Beatrice Hinkle, who analyzed both Naumburg and Frank. There is evidence that Naumburg introduced Alexander to Hinkle, although it is not clear that Hinkle ever took lessons from him, and he certainly was never analyzed by her (Hinitz 2013, 181).

In September 1913, Alice Dewey accompanied Naumburg on a visit to Lillian Wald's Henry

Street Settlement House, which had been built in the 1893 with the financial support of Betty Loeb and her family. Later that year, Wald offered Naumburg and Claire Raphael one room in the settlement house to run a kindergarten class. This one-room kindergarten—the first Montessori school in the United States—allowed Naumburg and Reis to try out their eclectic new idea for combining Montessori, the Alexander Technique, Dalcroze Eurhythmics, and Bentley dance movements. The emphasis of their program was on developing curiosity, interest, imagination, individuality, and unfettered self-expression in their young students (Hinitz, 2002,184). Within a few years, Dewey and Alexander were drawn into a battle over the use of "free-expression" in progressive schools like the ones run by Naumburg and Caroline Pratt (Dewey 2013, xxv–xxix; Alexander 2002, 78–81).

In 1916, after teaching in Montessori kindergartens briefly at the Henry Street Settlement, the Leete School on East 60th Street, and P.S. 4 in the Bronx, Naumburg opened the Children's School (later renamed Walden School). The school started in one room at the Leete School with preschool children and gradually expanded to accommodate all grades. As the school grew, Naumburg developed a curriculum based on Montessori, integrating the arts, the Alexander Technique, the psychoanalytic theories of Freud and Jung, and the work of other progressive educators. True to her Montessori roots, the school was individually geared to meet the developmental needs of every child, including the emotionally troubled, the disabled, and the academically successful (Hinitz 2002,430).

Newly married, Claire Raphael Reis left her job at the Leete School the year before Walden opened. Her new husband, Arthur Reis, had asked her not to do any work during daytime hours that would interfere with raising their children and running their household. Managing this restriction magnificently, she went on to become a major force in American music, founding the People's Music League in New York City, the League of Composers, and the New York City Center (Reis 1955, 27).

In a happy coincidence, Raphael's marriage and resignation from the school took place just as World War I had ended Irene Tasker's job teaching job at the Darlington Training College and at the Beaumont Street Infant School in London. Naumburg invited Tasker to replace Raphael as associate teacher at the Leete School. Her move to New York also provided Tasker with the opportunity to take classes with Dewey at Columbia and to study with Alexander, who was in New York at that time. At the end of the school year, Tasker accepted an invitation to travel by train across the United States with John and Alice Dewey. In 1917, after returning to New York, Tasker became Alexander's second teaching assistant in New York. By then Webb and Tasker were working together, in consultation with Dewey, to edit and consolidate Alexander's first two books, *Man's Supreme Inheritance* and *Conscious Control* into a single volume (Fischer 2014).

Alexander and the BEE

Most of the source material for the Alexander's relationship with the Bureau of Educational Experiments (BEE) comes from the excellent research done by Jeroen Staring, who went through the minutes of the BEE meetings archived at the Bank Street College of Education.

When World War I broke out in Europe late in July 1914, many of Alexander's pupils fled London anticipating the German bombs that were about to carpet the city. Eager to introduce him to John Dewey and hoping to introduce the Technique into early childhood classrooms in America, Naumburg offered to set up Alexander in a teaching practice in New York City. When Alexander arrived in New York on Sept 18, 1914, Naumburg had already rented rooms for him in the Essex Hotel and lined up pupils, including Arthur Reis and her future husband, Waldo Frank (Bloch 2004,

101). Between them, Raphael Reis and Naumburg knew so many wealthy and well-connected potential students that by 1916 Alexander's practice was full. Additionally, he invited Ethel Webb to join him in New York as resident teacher to a physically disabled 10-year-old child whom he was too busy to teach. Before long, Webb was teaching full-time on his practice and recruiting new students from her own extensive contacts in the city. For the next eight years, Alexander split his time between London and New York, with Webb maintaining his teaching practice in New York when he was in London (Bloch 2004, 100–1).

As Alexander built his teaching practice, Naumburg turned to her network of women educators, looking for opportunities to introduce the Technique into New York City classrooms. She arranged for Alexander to give lessons to two of the most influential and innovative women educators in the country. Lucy Sprague Mitchell was the first Dean of Women at the University of California at Berkeley, where she made waves by working to expand women's rights on campus and organizing discussions about sex education. Caroline Pratt had made a name for herself as a pioneer in play-based education utilizing specially-designed educational toys—handmade standardized wooden shapes that could be used creatively in play. Like Naumburg, Pratt's approach to education was based on a belief that children can teach themselves what they need to know with minimal adult supervision if they are presented with developmentally appropriate activities that engage their interest and all of their senses (Hauser 2002, 61–75).

In 1916, Sprague Michell and Pratt united to form the Bureau of Educational Experiments (BEE) using Pratt's Play School as a laboratory for conducting studies of children's behavior and growth through observations, narrative descriptions, family histories, psychological testing, and recordings of children's speech patterns. The BEE attracted leading women educators of the day, including Evelyn Dewey and Margaret Naumburg, and it soon expanded to other schools as sites for experiments, including Naumburg's Children's School (renamed Walden School in 1922). In 1916, the group invited proposals for experimental programs to be funded by an inheritance that Sprague Mitchell had recently received.

Sprague Mitchell submitted a proposal to test Alexander's theories in an elementary school setting. The proposal reflected Sprague Mitchell's understanding of the Technique as a corrective treatment rather than an educational process:

> I should like to see Mr. Alexander's work in muscular coordination tried in connection with some school where the results in mental as well as in physical terms could be assessed.
>
> Mr. Alexander feels that a great many baffling mental and even moral difficulties can be overcome or at least greatly helped by a direct physical attack on muscular coordination.
>
> ... He believes that one can acquire a new use of one's own body only after the experience of this use has been given to him…
>
> Consequently, in the beginning he asks his pupils to do nothing; he wishes them quite passive. He himself manipulates them, putting them in the correct position. In this he is amazingly accurate and scientific judged even from an anatomist's standpoint. When this correct position has once been experienced it can be consciously sought for, but not before. In readjusting the equilibrium and bringing about this new coordination, he breaks down the old subconscious and incorrect kinesthetic sense, and establishes a new, conscious kinesthetic sense…
>
> I think these children should be examined physically and mentally before any treatment by Mr. Alexander and again afterwards, in order to check up his results by the ordinary, scientific standards. (Staring 2015, 6–7)

At the same general meeting in 1916, Caroline Pratt nominated Alexander for membership and suggested convening a small informal conference where he could present his work. The vote on Pratt's proposal was tabled and then rejected a month later. There is some evidence that Alexander visited Pratt's Play School and perhaps Naumburg's Walden, but there is no evidence that he ever presented at the BEE (Staring 2015, 11).

In November 1918, after the release of the American edition of *MSI*, Pratt presented a new proposal for Alexander to train a young woman who would then work with children in Pratt's Play School. The proposal sparked a strongly worded response from Evelyn Dewey, which was cleaned up for the minutes of the meeting. "Miss Dewey expressed her doubt of the possibility of placing a student of Mr. Alexander's in the Play School owing to the fact that Mr. Alexander had expressed entire disagreement with the Play School program and the theory on which it is based." No action was taken on the proposal, and shortly after that Evelyn Dewey withdrew from the BEE (Staring 2015, 13–14).

Evelyn Dewey's objections at the BEE meeting were based on Alexander's attacks in *MSI* on "free expression" as it was practiced in Pratt's Play School and Naumburg's Children's School. The content and tone of the chapter in *MSI* can be confusing to anyone who is not familiar with Alexander's involvement with the BEE. Alexander's objections to the use of music, dancing, and drawing as "free expression" activities in the classroom were a complete rebuttal of most of Naumburg's educational beliefs and of Carolyn Pratt's Play School curriculum. Alexander believed that while older restrictive methods of teaching were faulty and ineffective, they were preferable to the new and more dangerous practices that he observed in America:

> If they are trained under the older methods of education, they become more and more dependent on their instructors; if under the more recent methods of "free expression" ….they are left to the vagaries of the imperfect and inadequate directions of subconscious mechanisms that are the inheritance of a gradually deteriorated psycho physical functioning of the whole organism. (Alexander 2013, 71)

He added this:

> I am convinced by long observation and experiment that the untrained child has not the adequate power of free expression. There are certain mechanical and other laws, deduced from untold centuries of human experience, laws that are only in the rarest cases unconsciously followed by the natural child of today. (Alexander 2013, 84)

And in what appears to be a direct criticism of Pratt's school, Alexander wrote:

> For I must confess that I have been shocked to witness the work that has been going on in these schools. I have seen children of various ages amusing themselves—somewhat inadequately in quite a number of cases—by drawing, dancing, carpentering, and so on, but in hardly a single instance have I seen an example of one of these children employing his physical mechanisms in a correct or natural way. (Alexander 2013, 81)

In spite of the criticisms Alexander leveled against the "free schools" in *MSI*, both Mitchell and Pratt continued to push a proposal for testing it at Pratt's school. In a statement written by Mitchell and read into the BEE minutes on Nov 25, 1918, Mitchell argued that there is no conflict between Alexander's theory and "free-expression":

> The Play School method as applied to little children and Mr. Alexander's system of

> conscious control are consistent with one another. They properly belong together in a laboratory school. They would strengthen one another if they were protected in conjunction….Mr. Alexander's attitude towards bodily functioning is scientific and his method of teaching sound since it is based on a sound analysis of the learning process. (Staring 2015, 3–4)

Mitchell's new proposal to the BEE called for the addition of a trained Alexander Technique teacher who would walk around the room and work with individual children as they engaged in their usual activities. The proposal was never implemented.

Although Naumburg never wrote or spoke publicly about MSI or about Alexander's issues with the BEE, her 1921 catalogue for the Children's School included a curriculum statement that reflected Alexander's ideas:

> Physical Co-ordination. A basic problem of education is the achievement of physical and mental equilibrium. It must be solved before a child can perfectly harness his energies in the direction of any work whatever. There need be no such thing as a clumsy or uncontrolled child. The School makes a special point of getting at the various problems of co-ordination. (Staring, Bouchard, and Aldridge 2012, 15)

In one of the prefaces to *MSI*, Dewey explained Alexander's position this way: "[F]reedom of physical action and free expression of emotions are means, not ends, and that as means they are justified only insofar as they are used as conditions for developing power of intelligence. The substitution of control by intelligence for control by external authority, not the negative principle of no control or the spasmodic principle of control by emotional gusts, is the only basis upon which reformed education can build" (Dewey 2013, xxvii).

But Naumburg and Pratt rejected the assumption that they were removing controls or allowing children to be controlled by emotional "gusts." The educational historian Clarence Karier wrote, "Naumburg's educational philosophy was not one of *laissez faire* where adults abdicated responsibility; rather it envisioned a highly sophisticated, well thought out socialization process which called into play a far more effective control mechanism than had been previously employed" (Karier 1979, 68). This method was called "child-centered" because the teacher took responsibility for structuring the experience in ways that would protect the child from feeling shame, insecurity, guilt, frustration, or other emotions that interfere with developing skills and habits of learning.

Naumburg's 1915 school catalogue describes the way young children learn to monitor their own behavior through carefully planned activities and each child's interaction with the group. "At first children flipped from one thing to another showing very little concentration but from day to day an evident change takes place in the entire group some more rapidly than others until gradually the whole class becomes a self-directed community" (Hinitz 2013, 305).

Throughout its history, the intelligent use of creative activities in every part of the curriculum was the core component of the Children's School/Walden School. In 1920, as Naumburg became interested in art as means of education and therapy for children, she invited her sister Florence Cane to run the school's art program. At a time when most elementary schools judged children's artistic talent by their ability to copy a form accurately, Cane wrote, "[T]he direction of my work has been toward the liberation of the child's soul through play and work and self-discipline involved in painting" (Cane 1926, 155). The sisters' interest in creative methods of teaching art gradually morphed into an exploration of the use of art as a form of psychoanalytic therapy.

After Walden

After the birth of her son Thomas in 1922, Naumburg retired as director of Walden, although she continued to play an advisory role in running the school. Her marriage was falling apart, and she had fallen in love with Frank's protégé, the Harlem Renaissance poet and novelist Jean Toomer. For a time, Naumburg and Toomer were actively involved in the Gurdjieff movement, which promoted alignment of emotions, thoughts, and instincts through self-observation, sacred dances, and study. After exploring various schools of mysticism, she dedicated the rest of her life to practicing, teaching, and writing about art therapy. Although she never received formal training in psychotherapy or art, she is considered to be the founder of dynamically oriented art therapy. In the early 1920s, Alma Magoon graduated from Teachers College, Columbia University and started teaching at Walden, where she learned about the Alexander Technique. In 1924, Naumburg divorced Frank, who married Alma Magoon that same year. From 1936 to 1939, Waldo Frank paid for Alma Frank to train with Alexander. Alma's daughter, Debby Caplan, was a physical therapist, an Alexander Technique teacher, and co-founder of ACAT. Over the years, the Walden School continued to play a role in disseminating information about the Alexander Technique in America.

Conclusion

Margaret Naumburg's attitude to life was open and expansive. She chose synthesis and open exploration over correctness and control. She did not dedicate herself to one method of teaching but looked at what each method could offer students.

Unafraid to openly borrow ideas from progressive education, kinesthetic methods of learning, and psychoanalysis, Naumburg pioneered a new way of approaching education through synthesizing complementary techniques. She was the first American educator to understand the value of teaching the skill of kinesthetic awareness to young children in elementary school classrooms. She developed a model of education that integrated the Alexander Technique with educational methods that engage emotions and creative impulses. In doing this she anticipated the integration of the Technique into conservatories and theater groups as well as the use of touch in somatic therapies. Unafraid of the unknown, she based her life's work on a belief that it is possible to learn how to re-engage with forgotten aspects of ourselves in creative and productive ways. Naumburg's own life path demonstrated the power that can arise from the kind of synthesis that embraces change without giving up what you had before.

F.M. Alexander's voyage of discovery began when he lost his voice on stage because his vocal mechanism let him down. He realized that the loss of his voice came from something he was doing and after the resulting intense exploration, he developed a method for consciously controlling destructive physical manifestations of ideas and impulses. His fear was that mankind's physical and mental deterioration would lead to chaos and destruction. And certainly, the history of the world since his death bears witness to the validity of that fear. He offered us a tool for developing conscious control of our preconscious instinctual responses to counteract this tendency.

Perhaps because she was a woman, a Jew, and an artist during a time when these groups were not fully accepted, Naumburg cared more about freedom than she did about mastery. She noticed that school children were being taught to sit still and regurgitate ideas. Caring more about repressed creativity than about cultural debasement, she was adamantly opposed to a world where children were not free to develop their own voices.

But great discoveries belong to the world. And once they leave home the world will do what they want with them. There is a story people tell about George Barnard Shaw attending a reading by another author. During the question-and-answer period, someone wanted to know the meaning

of a particular passage. At the conclusion of the author's response, Shaw stood up uninvited and bellowed, "Don't be a fool. That is not what it means at all."

By introducing the Technique into the early twentieth-century American cultural revolution, Naumburg was telling Alexander: "Don't be a fool. That is not what you meant at all." And of course, she was wrong too. We could say that their paths in life were oppositional... and that is great because all great innovation is born of opposition. The genius of the Alexander Technique is that it has a life of its own and we cannot tell where it will take us.

Future articles in this series will feature the contributions of Irene Tasker, Alma Frank, Henriette Michelson, Debby Caplan, and Judy Leibowitz.

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