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BEYOND HABIT, THE CULTIVATION OF CORPOREAL DIFFERENCE

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Change involves carrying out an activity against the habit of life.
F.M. Alexander[1]

INTRODUCTION

According to Aristotle, habits are a kind of second nature—nature because, once formed, habits retain their shape, but secondary because habits are an acquired *modus operandi*. Habits are not inevitable nor do they remain so as a matter of inevitability. That said, the dispositional tendencies of habit serve us well, allowing us to multi-task without a second thought. Habits are a form of corporeal scriptwriting, a shorthand for the body. They are dependable, not because they are instinctual or mechanistic, but because they function "as if" they were.[2] The formation of habit inaugurates a mode of organization in the subject which frees subjectivity at the same time as establishing for it a routine.[3] Habit's ability to function smoothly according to routine allows the individual to focus more fully on other matters.

Once acquired, habits are a tendency in the individual towards continuity or repetition. It is this 'towards' and the question of its reorientation which is the subject of this paper. Habits are good insofar as they are of value to the one who has them. A habit which *loses* value however is a force to be reckoned with. Its manner of persistence (a quality which goes with the territory) is now an obstacle with its own stake in the future. If, as Ravaisson claims, habits lie deep within the individual, beneath conscious will, how are they to be changed? Ravaisson ventures that a habit "born from custom" may wither once custom's circumstance no longer holds.[4] The problem is that habit can itself be constitutive of custom. Getting rid of habit is no mean feat then, requiring a battle of wits between two kinds of force: the voluntary and involuntary. The difference between these forces may be one reason why habits are so hard to shift. If Ravaisson is right to discern habit-formation as the imperceptible contraction of change into a deep-seated disposition, where is the common ground between a

will which wishes to resist and a habit that prefers to remain? On what turf is this battle to be staged?

This paper is an attempt to think through the relation between habit and its overcoming. It begins with Ravaisson's account of habit formation, which examines the progressive changes at work in the one who forms a habit. According to Ravaisson, habit arises because change to an individual becomes a change for the individual. The character of the change implicit in the process of habit formation alters as habit takes shape; that which began as something outside and apart from the individual becomes an element of its internal make-up. While the development of habit is empowering (capacity-building), its tendency to remain is not always a good thing.[5] One of Ravaisson's earliest examples of habit is illness, portrayed as a kind of habit taken up and resident in the body.[6] Addiction can also be seen as a form of habit gone wrong. The following discussion takes as its point of departure the problematical potential of habit. It arises from a field of movement techniques which adopt a critical perspective towards habit. Taken together, they espouse the pursuit of corporeal change through attempting to undo habit. Their pragmatic goal, expressed through the formulation and execution of dedicated movement strategies, is to promote difference in the body, against the force of habit. Such a goal could be formulated in relation to Spinozan thought, as the pursuit of greater corporeal capacity. Spinozan philosophy gives an ethical inflexion to the question of changing corporeal capacity. Spinozan ethics concerns itself with the changing qualities of agency and power manifest within corporeal activity. According to Spinoza, a body which becomes more capable—in action—becomes better in an ethical sense.[7] A movement technique which aims to enhance corporeal capacity through fostering corporeal difference in the body (beyond habit) thus constitutes an ethical project within this conceptual frame.

Alexander technique represents one such ethical undertaking. Posed in its own distinctive terms, Alexander technique aims to create "the space for something different to occur."[8] Predicated upon a particular diagnosis of what is bad about habit (its tendency to promote postural contraction), Alexander technique offers a strategic response so as to make way for something else: the possibility of moving otherwise. While it acknowledges that we are all wedded to the habits of subjectivity, that we are inevitably creatures of habit, Alexander technique aims to take on habit, to loosen its iron grip so as to enable the body to *become better* in the Spinozan sense. To become better in movement is to become more capable, more powerful and thereby available to a greater range of potential movement. Alexander technique adds something to the Spinozan mix however by outlining a practice which aims to *inhibit* what he sees as our habitual subjectivity. Why? To pave the way for another kind of corporeal agency, unfettered by the habits of a lifetime. Alexander spoke of 'non-doing' in relation to his technique. Although this may suggest a *lack* of subjective agency, the technique actually requires a very particular kind of engagement on the part of its subject. There are two moments in Alexander work: one, a certain way of dealing with subjectivity (*qua* habit), and two, the generation of movement beyond the habitual everyday. The first moment (subjective engagement) is a condition of possibility for the second (creating difference beyond the habitual body). I am interested in the creation of this space of difference. What does it mean to make space for something new to occur in the body, beyond habit? What does the notion of non-doing say about that which is cultivated through habit? What follows is a discussion of Ravaisson's conception of habit formation, an outline of three movement techniques which problematize the role of habit, and some concluding remarks regarding the relation between habit, subjectivity and the provocation of corporeal difference.

HABIT FORMATION

According to Felix Ravaisson, habit is not exclusively human but characterizes all of life: "Habit, in the widest sense, is a general and permanent way of being."[9] Ravaisson is careful to point out that habit belongs to *a* life, that is, habit can only take root in a being, able to adopt, and adapt itself to, change. Habit is an acquired state of affairs, the contraction of a change, a manner of creation. Habit is not mere change in the organism, rather a mode of change which is oriented towards the future: "habit remains for a possible change".[10] In other words, habits are something more than a form of repetition instituted from the outside. A stone thrown up thousands of times will not develop the habit of throwing itself up.[11] Habit is the way in which a being takes up change and, in so doing, creates something of itself, a pathway, capacity or facility which owes its existence to the past, yet

persists beyond it. The durability of habit, its ability to repeat or sustain itself, signifies a modification of the being in whom habit emerges. Ravaisson calls this "a change in the disposition, in the potential, in the internal virtue" of the one who acquires the habit.[12] Thus, while the habitual domain may arise in response to external stimuli, the development of habit represents the formation of a certain kind of agency within.[13]

The fact that habit "remains for a possible change" signals that something has been taken up by (or in) the individual to create a newly formed nature.[14] To that extent, habit represents the 'naturing' of nature, the cultivation of a difference which persists as the potential for a particular activity.[15] So, habit is the product of difference but also the way in which a being produces something of its identity in the form of skill or capacity. As Catherine Malabou writes:

> Certainly, change generates habit, but in return habit is actualized as a habit of changing. Being is thus habituated to its future. It *has* a future.[16]

To have a future is to have adopted something of the outside to create an "internal virtue".

Habituation produces a kind of power, the power to recreate or reproduce through repetition. The establishment of habitual behaviours allows for the inauguration of corporeal style on the part of its subject. The ballet dancer who practises pirouettes on a daily basis is able to perform these intricate turns with grace if not strictly ease. Prolonged training instils a kind of shorthand in the ballet dancer's body, the ability to perform ballet's lexicon of moves upon the right kind of signal. This is made quite explicit within the pirouette which has a set preparation, a 'wind-up' movement that triggers its turning motion. A corollary of the power to pull together complex movements is the location of habit beyond conscious will. This is not cause for concern. The existence of potential actions whose minutiae do not require conscious selection and execution are a boon for the individual, who is freed up to focus on other matters. Although the nuances of the pirouette are established and maintained by the ballet dancer's daily *barre,* there are many other performance variables with which the dancer needs to deal, such as the rake (tilt) of the stage, its surface texture, music, lighting, temperature, the particular arrangement of steps, and the presence of other dancers. The habits formed through such dedicated practice enter into this complex mixture of deliberative choice and given movement.

The power of habit, together with its ready to hand givenness, can be construed as a mixture of active and passive components. Ravaisson's analysis of human habit shows how habits occupy a shifting middle ground between activity and passivity, polar opposites which are inversely variable. Ravaisson writes of habit's "double law", which observes that passive sensations felt over time will recede, whereas action initiated on the part of its subject will strengthen through practice.[17] The double law of habit formation states that passivity dwindles as activity grows. This can be seen in the transition between conscious effort and spontaneous ease. As movement becomes habitual, the passive quality of conscious effort (felt in the form of resistance) diminishes while the activity of movement strengthens. This in turn produces spontaneity, a ready to hand ease of activity that no longer requires conscious effort:

> …as effort fades away in movement and as action becomes freer and swifter, the action itself becomes more of a tendency, an inclination that no longer awaits the commandments of the will but rather anticipates them, and which even escapes entirely and irremediably both will and consciousness.[18]

Habit thereby establishes itself beneath consciousness, "further down into the organism" so to speak.[19] This is an effect of habit, that habitual disposition no longer requires conscious effort in order to initiate activity. Ravaisson writes that the actions established by habit are the result of a "fusion" between the idea and its performance, so that ultimately "nothing separates the subject and object of thought".[20]

Ravaisson is careful to point out that habit does not leave the sphere of intelligence, that it is not a "foreign force" directing movement.[21] It is just that habit works beneath consciousness. Bergson explains:

> When we mechanically perform an habitual action, when the somnambulist automatically acts his dream, unconsciousness may be absolute; but this is merely due to the fact that the representation of the act is held in check by the performance of the act itself, which resembles the idea so perfectly, and fits it so exactly, that consciousness is unable to find room between them.[22]

The unconscious performance of habitual action is a skill, a form of bodily intelligence integrated within the self, 'ready to go'. It is the body's achievement to have developed the ability to gracefully glide through the templates of habit. As Bergson and Ravaisson both indicate, habitual action does not lack thought but rather represents a certain kind of thinking in action. Grosz calls it a non-Cartesian consciousness, according to which the individual is "prone to act".[23]

According to Ravaisson, the progressive development of habit through the erosion of effort does not occur consciously but arises in practice, through persistence. The conversion of effort into spontaneity is both incremental and imperceptible. By the same token, the dissolution of habit is equally subtle. Ravaisson writes that habits "often decline" if the conditions which originally produced the habit disappear.[24] Ravaisson does not detail the withering of habit in the absence of its customary milieu. How does a habit become otherwise? Does habit's double law move into reverse, from ease towards effort? What lures the degradation of habit? If habit has become part of the very being of the one to whom it belongs, surely a change in external environment will not suffice to bring about a corresponding change in habit?

I. ON NOT-DOING IT

Alexander technique is based upon a broad critique of the habitual everyday. According to Alexander, we tend to shrink (or contract) in the course of daily life. Contraction arises from the tendency to fixate upon our (movement) goals. The tendency to contract into action is well ensconced and clearly embedded within action *per se*. It forms the subject's habitual *modus operandi*, and functions as a feature of our habitual, motor intentionality. According to Alexander, contraction is the result of human "end gaining", that is, the tendency to focus on the goal or ends of an action.[25] The claim that we typically and chronically focus on our goals and projects rather than their manner of achievement resonates with Merleau-Ponty's depiction of the body within perception. For Merleau-Ponty, our practical orientation (towards the perceptual object) typically eclipses any awareness of the part the body plays at an everyday level.[26] The subject has no need to focus on how movement is achieved because, mostly, the world is within our grasp. Hubert Dreyfus defines motor intentionality as "the way the body tends towards an optimal grip on its object", an exhibition of what he terms "absorbed coping".[27] The general point is that our everyday movement habits serve our purposes well, so well that they merge with our very projects. Many phenomenologists give expression to the seamless immersion of the lived body in its situation, and indeed, Alexander would probably agree with all that they would say. The difference lies in Alexander's critical diagnosis of immersion (absorbed coping) and the pragmatic implications of his response. The Alexander technique aims to resist immersion. Alexander is more interested in loosening than maintaining grip. The technique aims to convert the subject's immersion in the perceptual scene into another *modus operandi* altogether, namely "the means whereby".[28]

Although contraction is endemic, it is not unavoidable. Alexander developed a strategic means by which to defuse the habitual everyday—through inhibition. Alexander technique proposes a two-fold progression:

1. Inhibition of the intention to act, and
2. Invocation of the Alexander directions.

The idea behind inhibition is to acknowledge that all intentional action (motor intentionality) is liable to the forces of habit. Alexander technique thus asks the subject to *stop* before moving (1), so as to enable the directions to take hold of the body (2). It cultivates a distinction between 'end gaining' (habitual motor intentionality) and 'the means whereby' (activation of the Alexander directions in action). The Alexander directions are a

mode of thought in the body. They lie outside the subject's habitual domain of movement. The directions are a set of interdependent, movement-vectors formulated to counteract the foreshortening inherent in everyday movement. Put into words the directions are: *free the neck, so that the head can move forwards and up, so that the back can lengthen and widen*.

Freeing the neck is a matter of undoing muscular tension. It involves softening and releasing muscular control so that the head is able to take up the direction of 'forwards and up'. The Alexander directions are not actions to be undertaken, merely images to be thought. In fact, the Alexander technique specifically calls for 'non-doing' on the part of its student. In practice, this means a finely-tuned letting go of muscular control, alongside a process of thinking without explicitly doing. In a sense, the directions 'act' the body.

The work has its own challenges, and students may spend years grappling with its demands: How to think the directions without doing them? How to allow the body to move without being the one who initiates movement? Since students of the technique may not have a sensory appreciation of the directions, Alexander technique requires the assistance of a teacher who works through touch to give a sense of their feeling in action. The quality and character of the Alexander teacher's touch is complex and dynamic. It depends upon the porosity of corporeal boundaries, and aspires towards a flow of insight from one body to another.[29] And yet, teachers are not supposed to 'will' their students towards a particular end. The point is rather to 'share' the insights of an informed Alexander body with a less informed one. Teachers activate the technique in themselves, as they connect with the body of the student. In Nietzschean terms, we might say that the performance of touch within Alexander technique is not a one-way flow of information from the body of the master to the student but an availability of corporeal forces, a proximal staging of the teacher's own practice spilling over into the body of another. The efficacy of the communication, its transitivity, is not guaranteed but enters the complex dynamic of learning itself.

Perhaps thinking the directions interferes with our habitual subjectivity. If stopping creates a gap, between intention and action, the subsequent thought of the directions insinuates itself into that gap, keeping habit at bay through their expansive remit. Students are asked to renew the directions time and again, to repeatedly think them in the body. It is as if the directions keep the body in a state of dynamic readiness, towards a wide spectrum of possibility at each and every moment of renewal. If habit contracts into goal-directed action, then the Alexander directions keep the body alive to the wider possibilities that encompass the moment. It could be suggested that the practice of expansion is a means to keep alive the virtual (and shifting) field of possibility underlying the dynamic body. Once an action takes on a goal-directed character, the virtual field of possibility is liable to shrink towards the subject's habitual means of movement and the teleological ends of motor intentionality. The Alexander body is not committed to the performance of any particular act but is *a body available to movement*.[30] The Alexander subject refuses to enter the absorbed coping characterised by Dreyfus, aiming instead to defuse the habits of a lifetime towards a different kind of becoming.

In *Nietzsche and Philosophy,* Deleuze makes a distinction between two types of becoming; becoming-reactive and becoming-active. Becoming-reactive characterizes the variety of modes of human becoming, including consciousness, experience and habit.[31] Deleuze raises the possibility of becoming-active, which requires a change in the reactive forces that constitutes the human type. The problem with this scenario is that reactive forces lack "the power of affirming which constitutes their becoming-active".[32] In short, reactive forces "lack a will which goes beyond them".[33] It is not that such a will cannot be(come) effective, just that it must leave the domain of the human in order to do so. A "superhuman element" is needed to shift the quality of negation into affirmation, an element which has the potential to transform the reactive apparatus.[34] This is key to the defeat of reactive force and the affirmative movement of becoming-active. Deleuze characterizes the shift from the reactive apparatus to the Overman as requiring a process of *active destruction*. Active destruction represents the explicit demise of subjectivity towards another mode of becoming.[35] Deleuze writes:

> Zarathustra praises the man of active destruction: he wants to be overcome, he goes beyond the human already on the path of the overman…*And thus he wills his own downfall*.[36]

If Alexander technique were to be viewed as a strategy of Deleuzian 'active destruction', its potency would lie in its conjunction of non-doing with directional thought in the body. Although the student must commit to thinking the Alexander directions, she/he must equally commit to not 'doing' them. In this context, non-doing could be thought of as the will to be overcome, and the directions a potency that lies beyond subjectivity (the reactive apparatus). Thought within the terms of this discussion, one might suggest that the efficacy of inhibition extends to the limits of subjective agency but no further, while the directions take up where inhibition leaves off. Inhibition is an antidote oriented towards a subjectivity which hopefully never succeeds, thus allowing the directions to take hold of the body. The shift from one domain to another is a kind of baton passing between 'types'. The work of the Alexander teacher is to facilitate the potency of the Alexander directions. In this setting, it could be thought of as a lure from one domain towards another, formulated to "inspire a new inclination for destroying himself…actively".[37]

Deleuze describes thought in Nietzsche as a journey made by an arrow. The arrow is not a property of the thinker but a projectile:

> He [Nietzsche] compares the thinker to an arrow shot by Nature that another thinker picks up where it has fallen so that he can shoot it somewhere else.[38]

The movement from inhibition to the Alexander directions could be thought in projectile terms, as a shift from one mode of thought (the reactive apparatus) to another (corporeal becoming). The concept and practice of non-doing could likewise be seen as an effort to displace traditional notions of the thinker (as knowing subject), towards a transitional, dynamic image of thought in the body. It is one which plays the relation between the virtual and the actual, aiming to enhance the virtual field of possibility through attenuating the 'descent' into activity.[39] Expansion is an impetus destined to go beyond the thinker as knower towards a body unhinged from the end-gains inherent in motor intentionality. Practising the technique is clearly complex, and whether the student can ever get it right is beside the point. Eva Karçzag refers to her Alexander teacher, Bill Williams, who "would repeat, over and over again, 'Nothing to get right…If it feels wrong, let it be wrong, if it feels strange, let it be strange'."[40] Strangeness as a generator of corporeal difference.

II. POTENCY OF THE IMAGE

Although different in an important number of respects—most notably through its use of the image— ideokinesis is similarly oriented towards change, beyond the level of the habitual everyday.[41] Elizabeth Dempster discusses the characteristic posture of ideokinetic learning, which she calls "the horizontal plane of instruction", also termed the constructive rest or semi-supine position.[42] Students of ideokinesis lie down in the constructive rest position in order to facilitate the work of the image. Dempster argues that the semi-supine posture "suspends the operation of the everyday habitus", thereby allowing the body to take up other movement possibilities.[43] The shift onto a horizontal domain away from the vertical everyday can be likened to the notion of inhibition in Alexander technique inasmuch as it is a strategic means of disruption which undermines the subject's recourse to his/her habitual *modus operandi*.

The horizontal plane of instruction replaces the subject's usual motor intentionality with the image. Like Alexander, ideokinesis depends upon the subject's not 'doing' the image. Anne Thompson writes:

> If an individual actively works to achieve physical change, through willing it, habitual patterns of body use will be activated and the process of ideokinesis will be obstructed.[44]

Dempster draws out the dual aspects of ideokinesis which decentres subjectivity through horizontal displacement on the one hand, and provokes change ('nervous repatterning') on the other.[45] If the mark of success is a change in the body's abilities, then ideokinesis calls for a shift in the body's *modus operandi*. This form of change is subtle and may well require an ongoing commitment over time.[46]

Ideokinesis is a performative strategy that takes the subject beyond those habitual dispositions embedded in the neuromuscular everyday. Its efficacy rests upon the potency of the image. André Bernard speaks of the image as "the facilitator of movement".[47] Images, for Bernard, have a life of their own. From a strategic point of view, the image is the means of change in the body. According to Barnard, the image is active, "it is happening", whereas the subject is in the position of observer.[48] Although ideokinesis does not call for inhibition as such, it flips the domain of the everyday (vertical plane) onto the horizontal plane of instruction. This shift is neither conceptual, nor a 90-degree transposition of Cartesian coordinates, but institutes a different set of gravitational forces beyond the realm of the everyday.[49] Along with the image, the shift aims to promote the release (disruption) of habitual holding patterns, in order to make room for neuromuscular repatterning. Lying down amid an altered field of gravitational forces opens the body to change, first through release then through activation.

The notion of release could be framed as a mode of active destruction, giving up the body's neuromuscular habits so as to repattern. The image thus works in conjunction with horizontal disorientation to enable a new set of corporeal forces to emerge. Following the logic of overcoming, we might construe lying down in constructive rest as a mode of habitual inhibition or overcoming (active destruction), and the image as Nietzsche's arrow. The image is a transformative device. It originates in the subject, over time moving into the domain of dynamic, corporeal change. Bernard exhorts the student to *become the image*.[50] In Deleuzian terms, we might explore this sense of becoming as a transition, between habitual subjectivity (thought in terms of the reactive apparatus) and the body's movement towards the new. Becoming-image (as corporeal activation) is facilitated by the potency of the image itself, manifest in "the transition from imaging to moving".[51] The shift occurs at two levels then, one, the displacement of the vertical everyday (habitual subjectivity) and two, the passage of the image from the domain of subjectivity to that of new modes of corporeal organization.

III. POSTMODERN 'TECHNIQUES' OF DECOMPOSITION AND RECOMPOSITION

There are many ways to make new choreographic material. Choreographers often select material through improvising. The problem with this approach is that the body tends to move in familiar ways so that, ironically, improvisation can lead to more of the same. Of course, improvisers are well aware of this problem and have many ways of dealing with it. But the tendency to reproduce what the body already knows is nonetheless palpable. There are good reasons for this. If training is a mode of habit formation, then its very efficacy depends upon the cultivation of given kinaesthetic pathways which incline towards reiteration. This may be expressed through the dancer's dispositions, movement tendencies, kinaesthetic sensibility, preferences and pleasures.[52] To what extent does the dancer's skill rely upon established habits? Is there any tension between the dancer's habitual repertoire and preferences and the adoption of new movement practices? In a sense, this is a problem which faces any body that wants to develop. But the challenge is intensified in situations that valorise the production of new choreographic material and therefore require the selection of new corporeal forces. The dancer's challenge in this milieu is to remain open to the new despite the pull of old habits (expertise).

This tension is not felt in the same way in the field of classical ballet, because ballet consists of a fixed movement vocabulary. While ballet training is complex and difficult, its focus is to maintain and/or develop skill rather than move between styles of movement.[53] Modern dance broke with ballet's lexicon, replacing it with the generative body of the choreographer. For example, Martha Graham's modern dance emerged from a choreographic repertoire, which (much) later came to be codified as Graham technique. Although Graham's oeuvre developed over the years, Graham's dancers nonetheless worked according to a certain identifiable style, famously comprising the Graham contraction and release.[54] Postmodern dance differs in a number of important respects, particularly in regards to its attitudes towards habit and training. According to Elizabeth Dempster:

> The postmodern is not a newly defined dance language but a strategy and a method of enquiry which challenge and interrogate the process of representation itself…Analysis, questioning and manipulation of the codes and conventions which inscribe the body in dance are distinguishing features of the postmodern mode.[55]

This last example is less homogeneous than the first two. It does not represent a single strategy but rather ensues from a shared heritage that broke with the kinaesthetic values of modern dance, while instituting its own modes of choreographic invention. One of the features of postmodern dance is its challenge to the dancer's embodied heritage or provenance. Postmodern dance does not espouse the knowing subject, which is always already trained and ready to exhibit that knowledge. Yvonne Rainer's "'No' to Spectacle" is often cited in relation to the shift in postmodern dance away from spectacular (knowing) display towards another kind of dancing.[56] Her *Trio A,* for example, does not present the dancer displaying what he/she already knows but rather shows a performer at work in relation to the choreographic demands of the piece. According to Sarah Rudner, who famously performed *Trio A*: "When it came right down to it, and you were there to do the dance, the best thing that happened was the body took over and the dance happened".[57] Trisha Brown's *Accumulation with Talking plus Watermotor* (1978) similarly calls for something other than knowing subjectivity on the part of the dancer. Brown claims that, once she started talking in performance, she couldn't keep track of her dancing while talking and *vice-versa*.

The same could be said of the retrograde and cut and paste compositional strategies often associated with Twyla Tharp. Rendering movement in reverse has little to do with what feels right or with what felt right in the original development of movement material. The retrograde problematic fosters a break with the habitual tendencies of normalised movement, requiring a body to embark upon a project of serial reinvention. If Spinoza is right that we don't know what a body can do, retrograde pragmatics assist in the enhancement of corporeal capacity, beyond the body's corporeal present and outside the dancer's habitual sensibility. Cut and paste strategies likewise operate independently of what feels right or familiar. Indeed, strategies of reconstitution offer new movement pathways, sutured movements, whose ultimate flow calls for foreign capabilities. Although the temptation is (inevitably) to form new habits/familiar pathways, the originating dislocation inherent in these strategies represents a notion of kinaesthetic value beyond the business as usual of the already trained body.[58] The choreographic concerns embedded in these strategies are time-consuming and challenging just because they go against the grain of habit, *beyond* the sensibility and dispositions of the dancer. Their manipulation of movement material, through modes of decomposition and recomposition, take the practice beyond the familiar, calling instead for a kind of corporeal adaptation on the part of the dancer.

This example is selected for discussion because it challenges the dancer's embedded movement subjectivity. It requires a kinaesthetic openness to change, towards what the postmodern choreographer, Russell Dumas, calls a 'body available to movement'. The imposition of external demands embodied in retrograde and cut and paste modes of recomposition represents an appeal to a non-subjective sensibility as a matter of aesthetic preference. The dancer or choreographer places him/herself within a problematic that lures the dancer beyond his/her given understanding towards the enhancement of corporeal capacity. This is not to say that all postmodern choreographers work in this way, but to indicate certain tendencies that lie outside the embodiment of habitual subjectivity according to embedded technique.

The tension inherent in this setting is that the dancer has to find a way to open the body to the unknown. Nancy Stark Smith refers to something she calls 'the Gap', a space that opens up once the dancer gives up his/her habitual modes of orientation.[59] This is difficult for the trained dancer. Russell Dumas writes of a process he calls 'slow rendering'.[60] Like 'the Gap' in Stark Smith's work, slow rendering does not depend upon the dancer's knowing what to do. Indeed, it requires a similar suspension of knowing for the body to take on new movement skills. Slow rendering aims to resist habit formation. Once a habit is formed, then the dancer has a 'solution' which tends to foreclose the body's adaptation to further (future) movement possibilities. Dumas' strategy of slow rendering is an explicit attempt to block or at least slow down the formation of spontaneous ease. As a

result, rehearsing his material is demanding. The dancer, for his/her part cannot rely upon what she/he already knows, while Dumas' challenge as a choreographer is to keep the choreography provisional. According to Dumas, subjectivity stands in the way of corporeal development, and must be strategically redeployed (employed) while the body learns:

> This practice of 'slow rendering' involves distracting the conscious mind with detailed complex physical activities. In the best scenario, the mind abdicates control over how these tasks are achieved within the body…[61]

Occupying the dancer's subjectivity with a changing set of choreographic demands is about the process of learning but also about performance. There is a sense in which the dancing itself takes priority. This has almost become an aesthetic value within postmodern dance, away from spectacular display towards the notion of choreography as a problematic to be actively engaged in performance. It differs from the quality of virtuosic display associated with classical ballet.[62] If Alexander technique poses inhibition, and ideokinesis posits the image, this family of examples asks the dancer to find a way to give over his/her knowing subjectivity, in favour of allowing the work itself to becomes visible, for audience and dancer alike. There is no single methodology of overcoming habit here, but a sense in which the complexity of the work calls forth a certain kind of abdication on the part of the knowing subject. In some cases, the actual choreography is so complex that the dancer cannot keep up. Something else has to happen for the work to flow.

CONCLUSION

Ravaisson offers a penetrating analysis of the way in which habit comes into being. His account of habit formation follows the emergence and incorporation of an inclination which comes to form part of the subject's "very being".[63] Ravaisson shows how, in the realm of human movement, wilful effort translates into spontaneous ease. In such cases, persistent effort pays off, producing a bodily intelligence ready and able to act. The benefit of such training and selection is to enjoy greater ease of execution, plus a certain reliability whereby thought and action become one. What if *another* thought comes along, however, one which aims to prise open habit's fusion of thought and action? How is that thought to exert itself? However valued, the core feature of habit—to collapse the interval between an idea and its performance—tends to fix movement, rendering it remote from conscious choice. If habit, once acquired, becomes an internal virtue, then the task of its overcoming requires a change to a part of the self. It is not so easy to 'give up' one's habits, just because they represent our day to day, practical competence. Hence the ingenuity of the various movement techniques under discussion.

Alexander technique and ideokinesis, each in their own way, attempt to outflank the spontaneity of habit, through inhibition, non-doing and displacement. Postmodern choreography tends to overwhelm the dancer with complex tasks, while embracing a process of changing demands. Postmodern dance is less organised around a singular method but its destabilised choreographic vocabulary nonetheless requires ongoing habit modification. If Alexander and ideokinesis attempt to break with habit, Dumas' slow rendering attenuates its formation. Inasmuch as our habits become us, forming a disposition which belongs to the self, these techniques could be viewed in terms of Nietzschean overcoming or Deleuzian active destruction. Inhibition and non-doing are potential candidates for a 'will to be overcome'. The milieu of postmodern dance similarly calls forth a movement beyond the givenness of training and technique. The postmodern dancer has to get out of the way so that the body can take up new movement possibilities.

It is worth noting the role of the other in each of these movement practices. Touch is a powerful device, able to stage and transmit a variety of corporeal forces and/or suggestions. The very difference of the other functions as a lure beyond habit.[64] It is moot, however, whether subjectivity can be actually overcome, in practice, or whether these strategies merely aim towards overcoming. Although each of these techniques aims to deconstruct habit, were it not for habit, none of their good work could stick. Even Alexander technique, which resists habit (re)formation, relies upon the habit of practice. Perhaps Bergson is correct to suggest that

what we can do is oppose one habit with another, in which case, it is more a question of one habit superseding another. Bergson writes of the human ability to stage such a transition:

> But man not only maintains his machine, he succeeds in using it as he pleases. Doubtless he owes this to the superiority of his brain, which enables him to build an unlimited number of motor mechanisms, to oppose new habits to the old ones unceasingly, and, by dividing automatism against itself, to rule it.[65]

The ideokinetic notion of muscular repatterning represents the movement from one set of habits to another. Although Alexander technique does not advocate the formation of new habits, Edward Owen refers to Alexander as the one who "mastered habit".[66] If Alexander, Ideokinesis and postmodern dance are any indication, such mastery does not come easily, calling for a nuanced approach by which to move beyond habit's familiar terrain. These strategies are not so much the exertion of will against habit but the attempt to defuse the spontaneity of habitual patterns so that the body can embrace and once again adapt itself to the new.

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NOTES

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1. F.M. Alexander, *The Alexander Technique*. New York: University Books, 1989, 3.
2. See Elizabeth Grosz, "Habit Today, Ravaisson, Bergson, Deleuze and Us." *Body and Society* 19 (2013): 221.
3. Grosz writes: "Without habits and their tendency to automatism, living beings would not have the energy and singularity of purpose that enables them to survive and to create, to produce the new, to live artistically." Grosz, "Habit Today", 225.
4. Felix Ravaisson, *Of Habit*. Trans. C. Carlisle and M. Sinclair. London: Continuum books, 2008, 57.
5. William James writes: "…the fact is that our virtues are habits as much as our vices. All our life, so far as it has definite form, is but a mass of habits,—practical, emotional, and intellectual,—systematically organized for our weal or woe, and bearing us irresistibly toward our destiny, whatever the latter may be." William James, "Talks to Teachers," http://www.gutenberg.org/files/16287/16287-h/16287-h.htm, accessed 20th September, 2013.
6. Ravaisson, *Of Habit*, 63.
7. Cf. Baruch Spinoza *Ethics,* Book III. Trans. E. Curley. London: Penguin Books, 1996. See also Gilles Deleuze, *Practical Philosophy*. Trans. Robert Hurley. San Francisco: City Light Books, 1988, esp. ch. 2.
8. Rebecca Nettl-Fiol, "First it was dancing, Reflections on teaching and Alexander technique", in *The Body Eclectic: Evolving Practices in Dance Training*. Ed. Bales and Nettle-Fiol. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008, 105.
9. Ravaisson, *Of Habit*, 25.
10. Ibid.
11. As Aristotle observes, "a stone, which has a natural tendency downwards, cannot be habituated to rise, however often you try to train it by throwing it into the air..." *The Nichomachean Ethics*. Trans. J.A.K. Thompson. Harmonsdsworth: Penguin Books, 1976, 91.
12. Ravaisson, *Of Habit*, 25.
13. Ravaisson notes that, as habit forms, it becomes increasingly "proper" to its subject (ibid., 31). Grosz writes of this as a means of identity: "habit is an anchor, the rock to which the possibilities of personal identity and freedom are tethered, the condition under which learning is possible, the creation of a direction, a 'second nature', an identity." Ibid., 219.
14. Ravaisson writes: "From the lowest level of life, it seems that the continuity or repetition of a change modifies, relative to this change itself, the disposition of the being, and in this way modifies nature." Ibid., 31.
15. "It is, finally, a *natured* nature, the product and successive revelation of *naturing* nature." Ibid., 59.
16. Catherine Malabou, "Addiction and Grace, Preface to Felix Ravaisson's *Of Habit*", in Ravaisson, *Of Habit*, viii.
17. Ravaisson, *Of Habit*, 49.
18. Ravaisson, *Of Habit*, 51.
19. Ravaisson, *Of Habit*, 53.
20. Ravaisson, *Of Habit*, 55.
21. Ravaisson, *Of Habit*, 57.
22. Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*. Trans. A. Mitchell. London: Macmillan and co., 1911, 151.
23. Grosz, "Habit Today", 223.
24. "…it is by a succession of imperceptible degrees that inclinations take over from acts of will. It is also by an imperceptible degradation that these inclinations, born from custom, often decline if custom comes to be interrupted". Ravaisson, *Of Habit*, 57.
25. Alexander, *The Alexander Technique*, 58.
26. In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty writes of a subject typically oriented towards the object. He also uses terms such as "bodily purpose" (99) and "motor intentionality" (137-8) in order to describe the sense in which the body comprises "an attitude directed towards a certain existing or possible task" (100). Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. Trans. C. Smith. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962. Ravaisson would put the matter thus, that through habit: "It is the final cause that increasingly predominates over efficient causality and which absorbs the latter into itself." Ravaisson, *Of Habit*, 57. In other words, the end becomes the means.
27. Hubert Dreyfus, "Reply to Romdenh-Romluc", in *Reading Merleau-Ponty, On Phenomenology of Perception*. Ed. T. Baldwin. London and New York: Routledge, 2007, 63ff.

28. See Alexander, *The Alexander Technique*, 14.
29. Elizabeth Dempster writes about the flow of insight through touch as the "transmission of precise kinaesthetic experience", *Writings on Dance* 22 (Summer 2003/2004): 38. She writes: "In the Alexander context, touch is both diagnostic and a means of instruction. As Carrington suggests… touching is sensing the state of the other" (ibid.).
30. This turn of phrase is often cited by Russell Dumas to signify a body unbound by or exceeding classical (fixed modes of) movement vocabulary. For Dumas, a body available to movement is able to take up new choreographic material (new movement). The phrase is also used by Alexander teacher, Shona Innes, to describe the sense in which a body can be open to a range of movement possibilities in the moment. It is a way of capturing the role of the virtual within the Alexander technique.
31. Deleuze writes: "Consciousness is essentially reactive; this is why we do not know what a body can do, or what activity it is capable of (GS 354). And what is said of consciousness must also be said of memory and habit." Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. Trans. H. Tomlinson. New York: Columbia University Press, 1983, 41.
32. Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 169.
33. Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 169.
34. Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 170.
35. It is contrasted with the last man who is "passively extinguished". Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 174.
36. Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 174.
37. Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 174.
38. Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, ix.
39. For a philosophical elaboration of attenuation in relation to movement, see Erin Manning, *Relationscapes, Movement, Art, Philosophy*. Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2009.
40. Quoted in Elizabeth Dempster, "Some notes on the staging of ideokinesis", *Writings on Dance* 22 (Summer 2003/2004): 45.
41. André Bernard speaks of "neuromuscular re-education – that is, we're trying to change muscle patterns". André Barnard, "Class 1 semester 1 New York University 29.9.80", *Writings on Dance* 22 (Summer 2003/2004): 6.
42. Elizabeth Dempster, "Some notes on the staging of ideokinesis", *Writings on Dance* 22 (Summer 2003/2004): 44.
43. Ibid., 44. The constructive rest position involves lying down with parallel legs bent at the knees.
44. Anne Thompson, "A position at a point in time", *Writings on Dance* 1 (1985): 6.
45. Dempster, "Some notes", 46.
46. Thompson, "A position at a point in time", 8.
47. Barnard, "Class 1 semester 1 New York University 29.9.80", 6.
48. Ibid.
49. Klossowski writes of the order of subjective understanding (in relation to the body) which both leads to the head and depends upon a habitually upright position. Pierre Klossowski, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*. Trans. D. Smith. London and New York: Continuum Books, 1997, 21.
50. Barnard, "Class 1 semester 1 New York University 29.9.80", 47.
51. Elizabeth Dempster, "A conversation with Shona Innes", *Writings on Dance* 22 (Summer 2003/2004), 55.
52. I have elsewhere argued that dance practice produces a mode of movement subjectivity and kinaesthetic sensibility in the dancer, and that this is expressed at the level of the dancer's perception, taste and dispositions. See Philipa Rothfield, "Philosophy and the Bodily Arts", *Parallax* 46 (January–March 2008): 24-35; "Differentiating Phenomenology and Dance", in *Routledge Dance Studies Reader*, 2nd Edition. Eds. Alexandra Carter and Janet O'Shea. London and New York: Routledge Books, 2010, 303-318.
53. In "Something old, Something new", Joshua Monten writes of the difference between "modernist stylistic consistency" and the virtuosic eclecticism involved in the need to "negotiate physical imperatives that often seem mutually exclusive", in Bales and Nettl-Fiol, *The Body Eclectic*, 56 & 60 respectively.
54. Graham's performed work involved a great many other features than the practice of contraction and release (staging, design, music, subject matter) but Graham technique is nonetheless very much centred on these signature movements.
55. Elizabeth Dempster, "Women writing the body, Let's watch a little how she dances", in *The Routledge Dance Studies Reader,* 2nd Edition, 232.
56. Yvonne Rainer, "'No' to spectacle", in *The Routledge Dance Studies Reader*. Ed. A. Carter. London and New York: Routledge, 1998, 35.
57. Sara Rudner in *Post-modern Dance: Judson Theatre and the Grand Union,* dir. Richard Sheridan. New York: ARC on Videodance, 1990.
58. Training can only go so far here because, as both Shelley Washington and Irene Hultman note, technique belongs to the material itself. It does not lie outside or prior to it. See "Training stories", in Bales and Nettl-Fiol, *The Body Eclectic,* 214 & 248.
59. Nancy Stark Smith, "Dedication to the moment", *Contact Quarterly* 12 (1987): 3.
60. Russell Dumas, "Dance for the time being", in *Dancehouse Diary #1*. Melbourne: Dancehouse, 2012, 10.

61. Ibid.
62. Dumas often remarks that the virtuosity of his work means that an incredibly difficult movement well done will look simple, nothing special. This is different from ballet which virtually announces its virtuosity.
63. Ravaisson, *Of Habit*, 57.
64. Feldenkrais practitioner, Leonie Hearn, speaks of touch as ensuing from "someone with not your habits". The fact that Hearn does not carry the same habits as her students means that her touch is able to inaugurate different impulses, suggestive of new movement possibilities.
65. Bergson, *Creative Evolution,* 279.
66. Edward Owen, *The Man who Mastered Habit*. London: Sheildrake Press, 1956.