

Developing and Evaluating Methods of Noticing
Through Which I Unexpectedly Learn a Lot About Moving My Feet

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Summary:

Executed across 10 consecutive days, this project involved a series of daily activities that totaled between one and two hours per day. Section I, written before beginning the project, contains a description of the daily activities and their relationship to the Alexander Technique. Section II contains the abridged version of my journal written during the project and references the supplementary video component.¹

Since it would violate the non-end-gaining spirit of this project to start with a specific goal to fix something, I originally framed this project as experimenting with observation. During my project, I developed and/or refined several observational methods: I learned that recording my observations by speaking and rewatching the video later is less time consuming than taking breaks to write, that two video cameras are more helpful than one, that a front camera isn't as helpful to me as a back camera, that using a mirror helped me observe tension of which I hadn't been aware, and that reading my journal from the day before is truly necessary to build off what I've learned (whereas in the past when I've kept practice journals, I tend to impatiently move onward and never read what I've written).

Despite (or because of?) my non-end-gaining intentions, it happily turned out that I also developed extremely specific insight into how I move my feet when changing the harp's pedals as well as a new method for doing this action more freely. When I sit behind the harp, most of my torso's weight is directed into the bench through my sit-bones. However, moving my feet around changes the balance of the torso. This can have ramifications for playing, because the harp balances lightly on the right shoulder. If the torso (and shoulder) move, so does the instrument. Since I have to constantly move my feet when playing the harp, I continually tense my lower back in order to keep my torso (and the harp) still.

Across the days and through much experimentation with ideas that didn't help, I gradually realized

¹ Amy Nam, *MHS 590 Amy Nam final project supplementary video component*, <https://youtu.be/4EVti8bh9kc>.

that if I need to move a foot, it is much easier to move that foot if I allow my torso's weight to shift somewhat more heavily into the sit-bone that is on the same side of my body as the moving foot. My opposite leg can facilitate this by remaining stationary and directing some weight into my stationary foot. However, if my stationary foot is resting with the heel on the floor and the toes on the pedals, which is often necessary while playing (due to not having time to put the foot flat on the floor after moving a pedal), my weight must be directed all the way into my toe, rather than into my heel only (directing weight into my stationary heel when my toe was on the pedals made it surprisingly difficult to move the opposite foot without huge engagement from both thighs). This creates a problem, however, to which I eventually found a clever solution. Understanding the problem and solution require having some technical knowledge about the harp (the following technical details are also explained, with demonstration at the harp, at the beginning of the video supplement).

The harp has seven pedals, each of which corresponds to one note of the diatonic scale. The pedals control the pitch of their associated strings. Each pedal has three positions: flat (the highest position, "F" in Figure 1), natural (the middle position, both "N1" and "N2" in Figure 1), and sharp (the lowest position, both "S1" and "S2" in Figure 1). A spring mechanism pushes the pedal up, so I must direct weight into the pedal to push it down. To move the pedal up, I carefully lessen the weight of my foot so that the pedal doesn't spring up violently. If the pedal is in positions F, N2, or S2, my foot does not need to be involved in holding the pedal there, because the pedal is pushing up against the ceiling of the notch and thus is stable. Moving the pedal into the N2 or S2 position is commonly called "moving the pedal into the notch," and typically the "default" movement students are taught to make when changing a pedal is to immediately place the pedal in the notch so as to not continue to exert effort pushing it down.

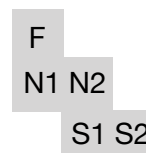


Fig. 1: Harp pedal positions

Here is the problem: if the pedal is at N2, and my foot is lightly resting on the pedal, when I want

to move my *other* foot, I want to direct weight into the pedal-resting foot to facilitate the movement of the other foot. That increase in weight will end up pushing the pedal down to S1. The solution, which allows me to keep the pedal in naturals and direct weight into my toes, requires sliding the pedal horizontally from N2 to N1, so that the pedal has a floor beneath it and will not move out of naturals when I start to direct weight into my foot. In some situations, it will be helpful to slide the pedal out of the notch as described, but in other situations (depending on how fast the music is, what happened before, etc.), it will be more helpful to simply forgo putting the pedal into the notch in the first place.

To apply this extremely specific revelation into actual music, I will need to spend time with every measure of the music, planning out my foot movements and then practicing them in isolation. This method requires forethought and is very different than what I have been used to doing with my feet (which was to put the pedals into the notch by default, then rest my feet lightly on the pedals, and then grip my thighs to move my foot because the stationary foot provided no real stability). See days nine and ten of my journal, when I began the process of applying this method to a section of real repertoire.

I still have much habit-inhibiting to do in order to fully benefit from this new knowledge. After I noticed that shifting my weight into the sit-bone on the same side as the moving foot is helpful, I realized that until now, I often unthinkingly moved my weight into the *opposite* sit-bone from the moving foot. This makes the leg of the moving foot seem more free but isn't actually an efficient way of moving.

The observational methods I experimented with will be helpful for me to continue observing my use in the future. Implementing them will also require some habit inhibition, as I am usually too impatient when learning new repertoire to think carefully about my body when beginning the learning process. Although at times the video could be surprisingly ambiguous in confirming my feelings as to whether I was leaning, twisted, etc., on select occasions, the video did make me aware of things I wouldn't have otherwise noticed (such as how my body's entire right side is lower than my left side).

The time that I spent at the harp during this ten-day project, exploring balance and movement with a completely non-end-gaining mindset, represents a significant departure from any practicing I've done before now. Every day, I took as much time as I needed to sit down with full awareness, tip the harp back onto my shoulder while observing the response of my body, carefully consider the relationship of my body to the harp, and then explore movement. This process often felt depressingly slow. And yet ten days of this painstakingly slow work led to major insight into the efficiency of my movement!

Section I - Background

Philosophy:

The Alexander Technique teaches that before you can change a habit, you must inhibit the habit. Before you can inhibit the habit, you must notice the habit.² During this project, as I notice my physical habits, if I observe a habit hindering efficient use, I will stop doing that habit. As I notice my daily protocol, if there are elements that are not helping me observe my use, I will also stop doing those things. In both cases, I will then possibly choose to do something else.

Goals:

- Notice my body deeply at every moment, allowing my body to truly occupy the primary focus of my awareness while at the instrument, even if this means I severely limit the scope of my practice activities.
- Observe my body's habits at the instrument and give myself the time to inhibit the unhelpful habits if I desire.
- Observe the effectiveness of different methods of observing (such as journaling while at the instrument, journaling and reviewing video after being at the instrument, etc.).
- I do not *intend* to change my playing through this project. If change happens, I will simply observe it.

² Judith Kleinman and Peter Buckoke, *The Alexander Technique for Musicians*, (New York: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2013), 25–33.

Initial components and parameters (subject to change):

Begin with 20 minutes of constructive rest (CR)

Find and use directions each day based on previous day's observations.

Research anatomy to refine the accuracy of my body map if necessary.

Journal any observations from constructive rest

Employ the following protocol at the instrument while video recording the session

Notice what happens to my body between the time I finish constructive rest, journal about it, and sit down at the instrument. Once there, proceed through the following steps: pull the harp pack, play a single note with one arm, then each arm, then play chords, a simple warm-up, and then small sections of repertoire. I will continue to the next step only if my breathing is easy and my body is balanced. If they are not, I will break the current task down to smaller elements and observe my body at each moment. I may spend an entire day, or multiple days, on a single step. I am not obligated to move on or complete the entire progression during the ten days.

Journal observations while practicing

Use the following prompts (learned from Katie Fittipaldi): What are my expectations? How is my breathing? Can I do less? Do I need a break? Where is my support? Am I in a hurry? What am I noticing?

Watch the video that I just created of the session

Reviewing video is a way of addressing Alexander's concept of faulty sensory perception.³

Journal thoughts about the video

How do my previous observations align with what I am noticing in the video?

Journal any observations about the entire day's process

³ Kleinman and Buckoke. *The Alexander Technique for Musicians*, 32.

Section II - Abridged Journal

Day 1, November 23, 4:06 pm

I listen to a guided CR by Mastaneh Nazarian.⁴ I am struck by the difference I feel when thinking about my neck as apart of my head (it immediately became tense) as opposed to my spine (it released). As usual, my knees don't balance: I have to engage my inner thighs to prevent my legs from falling out. I'll try using a band around my knees tomorrow as well as a shallower book under my head.

I feel upright as I move from CR to journaling to setting up the camera to the harp.

I pull the harp towards me, notice that the bench is not at the right height, and adjust the bench without curving my neck down, moving my head at the Atlanto-Occipital joint and squatting to adjust without arching my back outwards. When I sit back down again, I pull the harp back. I realize that I am in a hurry. I know that when I practice I often realize my weight is habitually in my left sit-bone. I put the harp down and find my sit-bones. I reach to pull the harp back and realize I instinctively shift my weight to my left sit bone even just when my arm moves up. I stop and imagine moving my arm. I choose to move my arm again without shifting my weight (inhibiting). Then I notice that my weight naturally shifts into my *right* sit-bone when I move my right arm. I put my hand on the harp, noticing what that does to my body when I start to exert effort in pulling it back. I realize I should pull the harp back from a much higher place.

Up to this point, I've been taking breaks to write these things down, and now I realize I should record my observations in speech and transcribe them later rather than taking breaks to write.

Watching the video later, I observe that when I sit down, my head tilts to the right. I had not been aware of this. My head continues to be tilted throughout the video. Tomorrow, I will put the camera directly in front, rather than at an angle, so I can better observe how much my head is tilted.

⁴ Mastaneh Nazarian, *Alexander Technique Constructive Rest Lesson*, <https://bodylearning.buzzsprout.com/382/244382-finding-the-floor-a-constructive-rest-talk-through>.

I noticed that just before sitting, my body tenses for a moment as I instinctively moved my upper torso away from the harp. I observe tension in my over-arched back as I pull the harp back without thinking. I sit again and observe the movement of my breathing for the first time.

Watching the video, I can't observe the balance of my torso well and decide that I should be in a sports bra in the future. I see that my mouth is hanging open, and I realize I didn't notice my jaw. I think my observations are accurate that my neck was stiff when the harp moved towards me. When I shift left to allow the harp to come under my chin, I see ease of movement, but I see that I could do less.

Day 2, November 24th, 5:46 pm

I read yesterday's journal. Today I use a shallower book under my head and a stretchy band around my knees so my thighs can release. It works well! I also look at myself in the mirror before beginning and notice that my head indeed looks tilted to the right, even though to me it feels completely straight.

I listen to a guided constructive rest by Constance Clare-Newman.⁵ I notice that my pelvic floor, eyebrows, and jaw are particularly tense. I make a new direction: "let the eyebrows be free."

Watching the video of my session, I see that as I approach the harp the second time, I successfully inhibit my instinct to move my upper body away from it. My head still appears tilted to the right. I wonder if this is a habitual response to the harp since I started playing at age eleven. I use both hands to pull the harp back, and my entire body's movement as I do so seems mild compared to yesterday.

I remember to direct my tense eyebrows to be free. I stiffen my lower back when I start to pull the harp back, and I inhibit this. I practice bringing the harp back several times, being very careful to observe my body's balance the entire time. When I play some notes with one hand, then both hands, my playing feels easy and my body feels well-balanced. Unfortunately, the optimal spatial relationship between my body and the harp that minimizes torso tension also makes the pedals be farther away than I am used to.

⁵ Constance Clare-Newman, *Alexander Technique Constructive Rest Lesson*, <https://bodylearning.buzzsprout.com/382/180114-alexander-technique-constructive-rest-guided-talk-through>.

Tomorrow, I will focus on pedaling instead of playing. It seems that when I am careful to remain balanced during the sitting process, my body also feels fine during playing, as long as I don't move my feet. Tomorrow, I will sit, aware of my balance, when watching the video. I will also use two cameras.

Day 3, November 25th, 3:09pm

Since I'm going to observe my legs approaching the pedals today, I listen to the "Foot Moves," "Knee Drift," and "Psoas Procedure" guided talk-throughs recorded by my undergraduate teacher, Sally Ahner (unpublished). The direction to release from my sacrum all the way through my toe releases tension in my pelvic floor. During the Psoas Procedure, at first I find it almost impossible to allow my knee to move towards my chest without a massive amount of arching of my back and excess muscular tension in my upper torso. I practice inhibiting before moving, and after a few times, my upper body is much less involved.

Watching the video of my session, I see that using two cameras is a helpful way to observe myself. From the camera behind me, I see that the first time I sit down (which I did carelessly) I really stick my butt out and contort to slide in behind the harp. I get back up and then sit down while being aware, and it looks much less effortful this time. I take time to notice my entire body and give myself directions.

I put my hands on the top of the harp and begin pulling the harp back, notice tension, and let the harp go back down. Is having that tension in my back necessary? I bring my hands up again and stop when they rest on the harp. I notice that my spine is twisted. Is it necessary to twist my spine this way?

No. I inhibit these tendencies and pull the harp back without twisting my spine or tensing my lower back. I feel much more centrally located behind the harp than I did yesterday (when I felt further to the left). Because of this, my weight has shifted severely into my left sit bone. This weight distribution is observable in the video. I experiment for a while to see if this is really due to my position on the bench. Can my weight be evenly distributed throughout both sit bones in this orientation? It cannot. I put the

harp back down, shift to the left, and slowly bring the harp towards myself again. My weight feels evenly distributed in my sit-bones, but I feel like my upper body might be pushed to the left. But I don't want to move further left and risk not being able to reach the pedals comfortably, so I choose not to change.

I put on my shoes, thinking of initiating movement with my knees. I realize I've lost awareness of my lower back and spine. I think of my lower back, and in video, the release is observable. I notice my left shoulder is pushing forward. I let my arms drop and then move my arm towards the harp while inhibiting pushing my left shoulder forward. I take a moment to observe my entire body consciously. I begin to move my left leg. I experiment, but no matter how small of a movement I think of making with my leg, I feel a great deal of tightness in my lower back. In the video, it appears as though I've rocked forward on my sit bones.

I decide to put the harp back up and experiment with moving my legs without the harp. I recall how moving my legs felt during the Psoas Procedure, and I remember there was a weight distribution change in my pelvis when moving my legs. Maybe I should allow a similar weight shift now.

I allow my weight to shift slightly into my left sit-bone as I move my left foot in circles (2:17 in the video). I still notice tension in my lower back as well as my inner thighs. Then I allow a much larger weight shift, my spine releases observably, and I breathe. I repeat with my right foot (2:44 in the video), and my upper body again releases when I shift my weight to my right sit-bone. I try moving both feet at the same time (3:10 in the video) and it looks uncomfortable and stiff. I notice my breathing, check in with my expectations, and realize I impatiently want to "figure it out" today.

I decide to actually change a pedal with my left foot. I allow my weight to move into my right foot (resting on the floor) and left sit-bone. I notice the stationary foot feels more secure if it's near my center. I change the D pedal, then notice I was holding a lot of tension in my back. I take a moment to check in with my body, my eyebrows, and my sit bones, and then move another pedal, allowing my weight to

shift and come back to neutral as soon as I'm done. I move pedals with both feet simultaneously, and it's clear my torso and spine are very involved. I observe that when I'm actually moving a pedal, the rest of my body isn't overly involved, but when I move my foot between pedals, many parts of my body stiffen.

Day 4, November 26th, 4:12 pm

Today, I'm going to move the camera to a better place to observe my back. I listened to a guided CR by Imogen Ragone⁶ and listened again to the "Knee Drift" and "Psoas Procedure" tracks. The Psoas Procedure was easier today. I felt a muscle deep in my inner thigh, I assume the psoas, engaging. I noticed myself end-gaining when I took off my knee band and was not aware of my body. I am still noticing eyebrow and pelvic floor tension. The eyebrows seem to need to release less than yesterday.

Sitting down at the harp feels a little stiff today and looks that way in the video, too. I think my going slowly might have led to unnecessary holding. I take a moment to notice my whole body and give my primary control directions to be free. I notice that these directions make me feel smaller and farther away from the harp. I inhibit my desire to arch my back forward and move towards the harp. I notice my breathing and sit bones as I reach towards the harp. I spend several minutes making adjustments. I observe that I could measure these distances (between bench and harp) so that I don't need to go through this lengthy process every time. But spending time making adjustments is better than what I typically do: sit down and if I'm approximately in the right place, I just start playing, then get really tense.

I think my weight is pretty evenly distributed in my sit-bones, but my spine still feels pushed to the left. I decide not to move, though, lest I get too far away from the pedals on the right side of the instrument. Watching the video, it is unclear whether my back is in fact bent to the left.

I continue experimenting with my feet today. I realize that to move my foot, I don't have to lift my entire leg off the bench. I explore "walking" my foot (pivoting between toe and heel) and sliding it along

⁶ Imogen Ragone, *Alexander Technique Constructive Rest Lesson*, <https://bodylearning.buzzsprout.com/382/70686-alexander-technique-constructive-rest-guided-talk-through>.

the floor. I also move both feet at the same time and notice holding in my feet and back.

I notice I can choose between using the balls of my feet or my toes to push down on the pedals, and if I choose toes, I tense my foot. Pushing the pedal with the balls of my feet feels easier but is not something I'm used to doing. I'll have to consciously move my foot further than I'm used to when approaching the outer pedals in order to move them with the balls of the feet rather than the toes.

I notice a lot of tension in the upper thighs of both my legs as I try to move the pedal into the notch. I realize that truly pushing the pedal all the way down first before moving it sideways makes it easier to move it into the notch. But I am unable to inhibit the tension in my left thigh as I move my right foot pedal in and out of the notch. I try directing my left knee forward so my weight goes into my right sit-bone and left foot, but that feels completely awkward and doesn't help the tension in my left thigh.

I wonder if pedals are just a thing that require a lot of muscular effort, and maybe there's not a way to do less? After I get up from all this, my left sit-bone and part of my left lower back hurt. I must have been putting more weight into my left side. But I had felt balanced. Faulty sensory perception?

Day 5, November 27th, 1:47 pm

I review notes from yesterday and listen to a guided CR by Carolyn Nicholls.⁷ It is interesting that she says our aim is elasticity and to not to think of relaxing into the floor. I use the band around my knees while listening to the guided talk-through, and then I remove it without losing awareness. I do some Foot Moves and Psoas Procedures. I also experiment with moving just my toes and just my heels to see how my body responds. It's much easier to move the toes than the heels but possible to move the heels quite easily. I also found that in the Psoas Procedure, I can lift a leg without tension in the opposite leg's thigh (which felt impossible yesterday when sitting at the harp).

When I sit down at the harp, I see (in the video) that I'm more tense when sitting down because

⁷ Carolyn Nicholls, *Alexander Technique Constructive Rest Lesson*, <https://bodylearning.buzzsprout.com/382/222748-alexander-technique-constructive-rest-talk-through>.

I'm trying to avoid the laptop camera under my bench. I notice my body, give my primary control directions, and experiment with moving my right foot around while asking myself if I can do less.

I feel a lot of tension in both thighs. I scoot towards the edge of the bench so that my leg weight doesn't rest on the bench. Moving my feet becomes easier but still causes tension in my lower back. I try only moving my right knee side to side, then up and down, while keeping my toe stationary. I can do both of those things without any tension in my spine or grabbing in my thighs. But moving the entire foot—that's what causes tension through a whole lot of the rest of my body.

I notice that even the thought of "I'm about to move my foot" creates holding in my lower back. I practice having that thought while inhibiting the holding and directing my neck to be free, my pelvic floor to release, and my eyebrows to release. I find I can now have the thought without having holding.

I slightly shift back on my sit bones and notice I can more easily move my foot. I also notice I can think of a rotation in the leg to initiate the movement. I let the heel rotate outward just a bit and then find I can slide my heel forward with the toe and I feel no engagement in the opposite thigh! I repeat the procedure with the left foot and observe the same things. Significantly, I'm not moving my toe off the ground, and this helps my support shift around less.

I decide to try lifting my right foot totally off the ground. I direct my weight forward into my left foot and allow my weight to shift into my right sit-bone. I am able to lift the right foot off the ground with some engagement of the left thigh but not nearly the extreme grabbing that I observed yesterday. I repeat with the left foot. Both times, I initiate the movement by thinking about a small rotation. I realize that I probably should never lift my weight entirely out of both feet at same time.

I put my right shoe on, then my left shoe, and explore movement in my shoes. I pull the harp back to my shoulder and make several adjustments. My spoken observations of how I feel align with what I see in the video, which is more helpful for me today because I centered it directly behind my back more

carefully. Eventually I look and feel totally centered.

I move my right foot (allowing an accompanying weight shift). I observe that the heel of my shoe catches on the carpeting, causing me to have to use more effort. (It's very obvious in the video.)

Once my right foot is resting on the A pedal, my weight goes back to neutral. I experiment with moving the pedal down, allowing my weight to shift into my sit bones as necessary, observing tension in my thigh. I feel the opposite leg's thigh muscles grabbing every once in a while, but they aren't continuously engaging (like yesterday). I repeat with left foot pedal at the D pedal. I notice the right thigh occasionally tries to grab but isn't continuously engaged. Maybe I should have started with the inner (E and B) pedals, rather than the outer (A and D). Maybe each pedal will necessitate a different approach. I observe that when I move the pedal into the lowest notch, I have to pick up my heel off the floor; otherwise, if the heel remains on the ground, I engage the thigh muscle of the opposite leg.

Day 6, November 28, 12:10pm

I read my journal from yesterday and listen to a guided CR by Ariel Carson.⁸ The guided talk prompts me to *trust* the floor's support fully. I feel tiny releases in my neck as I think those directions. I notice the inhibition of tension in my eyebrows is more easy and automatic. I do Foot Moves, Knee Drift, and the Psoas Procedure. The Psoas Procedure particularly feels less effortful today. Today I change the placement of the foot camera so that I won't have to be careful not to step on it.

I pull the harp back and my weight is in my left sit bone. After an adjustment, I feel the most balanced I've yet felt. I don't feel like the harp is interfering with my sitting at all. I notice that moving my legs behind the harp is somewhat different than what I do in CR with the Psoas Procedure because at the harp I can't move my knees in towards my midline without them hitting the back of the harp. But if I point my knee towards my midline, my psoas can still do the work without engaging my lower back.

⁸ Ariel Carson, *Alexander Technique Constructive Rest Lesson*, <https://bodylearning.buzzsprout.com/382/345756-alexander-technique-constructive-rest-guided-talk-through>.

I try initiating movement with a small rotation of the heel (3:15 in the video) and put my right foot in the harp shoe. In response to my observation yesterday, I covered the heels of my shoes in bits of plastic bag (held by rubber bands). It does help the friction, but the plastic soon comes off.

I want to discover whether there is a place where I can rest my heel near the pedals that will allow me to use minimal effort moving to other pedals. First I see if I could have the left heel in one place and pivot to both the C and B pedals (the two innermost pedals on the left side). I can if I'm willing to use my toes and not the balls of my feet to push the pedals. Then I notice if I change the outer pedal first, I can slide my foot inward to the next pedal with minimal effort. But it's much much harder to push my foot outwards. On the right side, I can push down the A pedal without my left thigh engaging, but then it engages when I start sliding the pedal into the notch (other pedals don't cause this engagement, because they aren't as far from my center). I am able to inhibit this engagement of the thigh if I use the ball of my foot on the pedal. I then become aware that I'm clenching my pelvic floor and my right sit-bone is lifted almost off the bench, which is not desirable, because it's my right foot that I'm moving!

At this point it appears my back is leaning to the left a bit.

Then I do several experiments moving all the pedals between natural and flat. I observe that if I start with my feet on the outermost pedals and work inwards, it's easy to change from flats to naturals and from naturals to flats. If I begin with the innermost pedals and work outwards, changing from naturals to flats works because after changing the pedal, I can use my toe on the same pedal to rotate my heel and then rotate my toe, kind of "walking" my foot to the next pedal. That allows me to use minimal effort, but it's definitely slower than what I normally do (which is to let my core and upper body tense up as I lift up my feet off the ground and change the pedals as fast as possible). However, it's difficult to change the pedals from flats to naturals beginning on the innermost pedals and working outwards; the angle isn't conducive to walking my feet out in the same way. I'll observe more tomorrow.

Tomorrow, I will also set up a mirror in front of myself in interest of gaining real-time feedback.

Day 7, November 29th, 10:10am

I read over my notes from yesterday and set up a mirror. I read portions of Barbara Conable's *What Every Musician Needs to Know About the Body*⁹ that concern legs and the pelvic floor since I observe so much habitual tension there. "When you depress a pedal the back of your heel may rest on the floor, but the movement is at the joint at the front of the heel, not at the back of the heel. If you understand this your foot and lower leg will not get tired or sore when you use pedals," she says.

I listen to a guided CR by Jane Clappison,¹⁰ and it was by far the most different from all the others. It briefly asked me to notice my breathing, but mostly it was variations of "don't do anything." I gave myself permission to not do anything. Another way to think about inhibition: it's choosing *not to do*.

I take a long moment to sit at the harp and notice everything. I notice that I can indeed feel my pelvic floor be slightly pushed out as I inhale (an observation prompted by my Conable reading). I notice that I can use less effort to be upright. My back had been arched and stretched up. I let go of that and feel smaller even as I think about lengthening and widening. I pull the harp back and look in the mirror. I can see the subtle effects of tension in my jaw and eyebrows. I move my right foot around on the floor. I feel involvement in my lower back, but not my left thigh. I realize I habitually start with my right foot.

I put my shoes on, slowly. My weight feels evenly distributed. I move my feet as levers and feel a tiny pop in each foot as I initiate the movement. The pop, which I assume comes from the joint, was much farther forward than where I am used to thinking about my foot joint.

I decide to move my feet according to my habit and observe what I had been doing before. It feels quite jerky, and in the video of my back, the movement almost looks violent! I notice, however, that

⁹ Barbara Conable, *What Every Musician Needs to Know About the Body* (Portland: Andover Press, 2000).

¹⁰ Jane Clappison, *Alexander Technique Constructive Rest Lesson*, <https://bodylearning.buzzsprout.com/382/784896-constructive-rest-guided-talk-through>.

I do kind of alternate my feet as I move; I don't actually move both feet off the ground at the same time.

I realize that perhaps I don't need to find a way to do that.

I take a moment to notice my breathing and push the innermost pedals from flats to naturals. I notice that my sit bones slide backwards in response (observable in the video). Yesterday I had problems changing the pedals from flats to naturals when moving from the innermost pedals to the outermost pedals. I decide to move just one foot at a time. I shift my weight into my left foot and move my right foot, then shift my weight into the right foot and move the left foot, etc.

I notice some gripping in my left thigh as I move the right foot out and away from me. It seems to be in response to the difficulty of overcoming the friction of my heel on the carpet. I try purposefully directing weight into my left heel (with toes resting lightly on the pedals) but still feel the gripping in my thigh. I realize, though, that if I put my left toes on the ground, and the weight is also directed into the toes, I don't have gripping in my left thigh. Then I have a revelation. I push a pedal down with my right foot, but I don't slide it into the notch—then I direct my weight into my right toes, move my left foot, and find I have no gripping in either thigh. This works for both feet! I need to direct weight into the toe (and the balls of the feet) (3:34 in video). I practice changing all the pedals from flats to naturals. This works beautifully! My back looks very still during this.

I look in the mirror and see I've leaned to the left. When I get up, I feel tingling for a while in left lower back and sit-bone area. Today, I go ahead and take two minutes to mark the positions of the bench and harp on the floor with tape. Why didn't I do this before? I guess I was in a hurry.

Day 8, November 30th, 4:08pm

Last night, I listened to a hour-long Feldenkrais lesson on the pelvis by Nick Strauss-Klein.¹¹ I felt affirmed in what I've noticed regarding the weight-shift interaction between the legs and pelvis and felt

¹¹ Nick Strauss-Klein, *Your Navigational Pelvis*, <https://feldenkraisproject.com/lesson/your-navigational-pelvis/>.

like the lesson refined my way of thinking about it. I read yesterday's journal and remember that I should use the mirror to notice if I've started to lean left. I listen to a guided CR by Nancy Romita¹² then spend a few more minutes noticing and doing small moves with my feet, pelvis, and legs. It occurs to me that in the future, I could make moving the pedals part of my daily warmup.

Even though the harp and bench are in the same spots as yesterday, I still find I need to make several adjustments until I find the place where the harp feels lightly balanced on my shoulder. I repeat what I discovered yesterday, changing the pedals from flats to naturals, moving outwards, and it works as it did before. Now I go outside to in, naturals to sharps. I observe that the stationary leg has tension in the thigh when I move into the notch, particularly when I'm moving the A and G pedals into the notch. I work sharps to naturals, in to out, and find I can "walk" my foot along the pedals in the same manner as I did for naturals to flats.

Can I do less? Am I in a hurry? I ask myself. Yes and yes.

I work naturals to sharps, in to out, alternate moving the pedals so I can shift my weight into the moving side's sit-bone and opposite side's toe. This is working well, so I decide that tomorrow I'll practice changing pedals with real repertoire, a new stimulus.

In the mirror I observe myself and allow subtle changes, observable in my spine, which then looks more upright. I think I might have been twisted (with my left side forward).

Day 9, December 1st, 2:30pm

I read yesterday's journal and pick out repertoire with lots of pedal changes: "Magic Fire Music" from Wagner's *Die Walküre*. I recall that a few days ago I experimented with initiating movement with a rotation. I would like to think about that again today. I listened to several more pelvic-related procedures from my undergraduate Alexander teacher. In the instructions, she says to think about the bone, not the

¹² Romita, Nancy, *Alexander Technique Constructive Rest Lesson*, <https://bodylearning.buzzsprout.com/382/135772-alexander-technique-constructive-rest-lesson>.

muscle, so that only as much muscle as necessary will be moved. That was interesting. During one procedure in which I move my tailbone, I barely moved the muscles, but could still feel release. I was surprised by the tension release in my thighs release when I thought the direction “knees away.”

I sit down in the same place as yesterday and realize my old habit of leaning away as I sit down seems to no longer be a habit! I put on my shoes, breathe, and notice that I feel far away from the harp.

“I have time,” I tell myself. I become very grounded. I notice and inhibit holding in my upper thighs and eyebrows. I allow my neck to be free and my head to float forward and up. I realize that as the head moves forward I can feel a change in the muscles of my lower back.

As I sit longer and longer, I observe that I feel myself settling and trusting the bench more. I pull the harp back, and it feels balanced.

When I *thought* about setting the pedals for Fire Music, I noticed (and then inhibited) tension in my upper calves (a new place I haven’t noticed tension in yet)! I experiment with initiating movement with a rotation. It doesn’t seem to be helpful today, but today it does seem helpful to initiate the movement by first pulling the foot slightly backwards.

My weight shifts into the right sit bone. I use my right foot to push the E pedal from flats to naturals (but not into the notch), then let my weight shift into my right toe and left sit bone, freeing my left foot (it looks very free on the video!), which then pushes the B pedal down to sharps.

I start to count off, intending to try the excerpt in rhythm, but I could tell by my body’s tense response that I should first work with the excerpt out of time. I talk through the excerpt as I change the pedals (not playing the notes or involving my hands), noticing how much choice I have in how I move the pedals. Now that I’m using the pedal as a place to put some weight to free the other foot, I realize that I may not always want to slide the pedal into the notch right away.

I notice that I have a competing habit. The alternative to letting the weight shift into the moving

leg's sit-bone (and opposite foot) is to shift my weight into the opposite leg's sit-bone, tense my entire back and opposite leg, and lift the entire leg (including the sit-bone) off the bench. I think that the stimulus of looking at the physical music revealed this habit to me. I inhibit it and move on.

I slowly work through the excerpt, feeling my weight shift into the moving leg's sit bone and opposite foot. I take a break to take a few breaths and notice and release holding in my lower back. Basically everything works as I expect, based on my new principles of moving pedals. Although I do have the pedal changes marked in my music, I realize that my new method allows me to make even more choices about the pedal movements than I have notated, and for optimum efficiency, I should plan the exact details of the pedal movements in advance.

When moving to the G and A pedals, I have to keep remembering to reach farther than my habit has me move (in order to use the balls of feet). I reach the end of the excerpt, and in general my method is working quite well. Tomorrow, I want to pick a measure (or less) and see if I can make it *much* faster.

I decide to develop a practice routine for myself for warming up my feet. I start with the pedals all in flats (the default), begin with my feet on the outermost pedals, and move inwards, changing the pedals to naturals, alternating feet, feeling the weight shift with every foot movement. Then I reverse that, moving from the innermost pedals towards the outermost pedals, changing everything back to flats. Then, I slide my feet on the floor, back to the innermost pedals, and move from the innermost pedals to the outermost again, this time changing the pedals from flats to naturals. Then I reverse that, moving from the outermost pedals back in, changing the pedals from naturals to flats. This covers all four combinations of directions (out to in) with pedal changes (up and down).

A few days ago, I had developed a method of "walking" my feet down the pedals (alternating pivoting on my toe and heel). I realize this actually isn't as effective (or fast) as my new weight-into-the-toe-on-the-pedal method.

Day 10, December 2nd, 12:50pm

I read yesterday's journal and remind myself that I may need to reach my foot further than I think for moving the G and A pedals. I am going to watch out for my habit to move my weight into the stationary side's sit-bone. Today I do constructive rest without a guided talk through, giving myself directions. I experimenting with lifting weight out of each foot, noticing my pelvic floor and eyebrows.

I sit down at the harp and breath, inhibiting my desire to quickly put my shoes on and begin. I put on my right shoe and experience holding in my left thigh. I stop. Then I put my shoe on without tension in that thigh by thinking of initiating movement in the leg by slight movement backward first. I put on my left shoe, easily. I continue to sit at the harp. I begin to feel smaller. I let go of my habit to "sit up straight and tall." I adjust until the harp feels balanced.

I start by freeing my right foot and moving it around, feeling the weight in my right sit-bone and left leg. I move it to the A pedal, but don't reach far enough the first time, so I move my foot again.

I go through the "pedal warm-up" I developed yesterday, and it feels great (4:32 in the video). Observing the video, I think my spine looks the most upright today of all the days. My weight shifts are subtle but clear; I can look at my back and know which foot is free.

I find a very pedal-filled measure (see Figure 2). Carefully and with awareness, I set the pedals to the positions necessary for starting. I check in with my breathing, eyebrows, and pelvic floor. I notice I have shifted to the left a bit. I try to move to the center and feel that I've overcompensated. Then, I stop, and I think about balancing. In the video, my back becomes balanced.

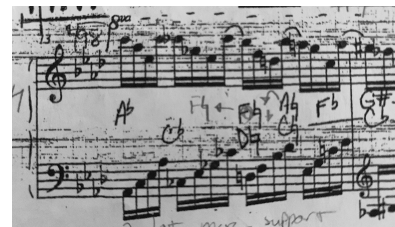


Fig 2: Richard Wagner, *Die Walküre*, Act III, rehearsal no. 98, harp

I move the measure's pedals in rhythm, slowly. I have to stop and think. In one place, I need to move my left foot while the right foot is resting on a pedal that is in flats, and thus can't bear weight. But

I realize I could move the right foot to the next pedal ahead of where it's written, change it early, and then direct weight into that pedal, which will be in naturals. I stay aware of my body as I mark the music.

I change the measure's pedals again, still extremely under tempo and somewhat out of time. It is a strange feeling, but easy. I manage to be somewhat more aware of the weight in my sit-bones at each moment. I notice that my weight might not shift with every pedal marking; it only shifts when the foot actually has to move to a different pedal. This can be a bit disconcerting to the brain.

I talk myself through it once, using verbal cues to help myself stay aware of the weight shift in my sit-bones. It begins to feel comfortable. I play it again, slightly faster, first stopping to make some adjustments in the exact rhythmic placement of pedals. I play it again faster.

I notice I'm still not moving my foot far enough to use the balls of my feet to move the A pedal.

I play it again, fairly close to tempo. I notice that though it went well, at the end I started to lean backwards and my back was stiff. I play it again, noticing this; now it feels more like a tense rotation of the spine than a stiffening. I play it again, a couple more times, paying careful attention to my back (6:25 in the video).

Moving like this will require a lot of advance planning until it becomes natural, but it works!

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