

Interview of Catherine Fitzmaurice

by

Saul Kotzubei

KOTZUBEI: Can you give me a brief overview of what you teach?

FITZMAURICE: Basically, I'm trying to improve the expressivity and range of the voice, and create healthy vocal habits. I do this through work I've called Destructuring and Restructuring, as well as work on speech and text. This body of work has become known as Fitzmaurice Voicework®.

Destructuring involves reducing excess bodily tension, specifically around the breathing process, to allow for more spontaneous and varied sound-making, sound which is connected to your body, your ideas, and your imagination. Restructuring involves learning to breathe in the most physiologically efficient way to support the voice without losing spontaneity. I also do work to free up the articulators. Then I bring all of this to bear on text to make expression as clear and interesting as possible. Today, though, let's just talk about Destructuring and Restructuring.

KOTZUBEI: As a part of Destructuring, I've seen your students' do a lot of what looks like shaking. Here's the obvious question. What does that have to do with my voice?

FITZMAURICE: The tremoring is a reflexive action, it's not an intentional shaking. This is the healing response of the body to a perceived stress. For instance, in fatigue, or cold, or anger, or fear, in all of these the body can involuntarily shake, and its purpose is to heal the problem. It's part of the "fight or flight" response. The involuntary tremoring does a number of different things. It may speed up the breathing and the heart-beat to oxygenate the blood, it loosens muscles, and it gives you an adrenaline rush, primarily. It does these things to enable you to be alert, with pliable muscles, so you are ready for anything.

What it does for the voice—apart from deepening the breathing, which is why I first started to use it—it tends to release tight muscles, and you'll discover that as you work. It also sensitizes the body to vibration. Vocal resonance vibrates the body, and when muscles are tight, that resonance can't flow through the body. It flows better when you release muscles.

In doing the different positions in which you tremor, you trust your breathing reflex, and then vocalize on that spontaneous breath pattern. This takes you out of the mindset where your response to a problem is to tighten and hold your breath. Instead you find a second-wind kind of response, in which the breathing is deepened, your muscles are available, and you're very vibrant and alert. This comes from a different neurological functioning.

We have two nervous systems: our central nervous system, which allows us to exert conscious motor control, and our autonomic nervous system, which is responsible for basic body functions like the heart-beat, digestion, and, when we're not controlling it, our breathing. When we get cold, our first conscious reaction might be to tighten up, to brace against the cold, thereby actually restricting blood flow. But when you get really cold, the autonomic nervous system takes over and you begin to shiver. You get warm when you start to shiver. So when my students use this work as a warm-up, it literally warms them up.

KOTZUBEI: What happens if I'm doing the tremor, and my breath doesn't seem to change, and I don't feel warmer. I'm just watching my legs shaking.

FITZMAURICE: I would try to get you into a slightly more extreme version of the position. Or if you're working too hard, and that rigidity is preventing you from feeling anything, I'll have you ease up. Sometimes, too, you just need a different position. I teach many different positions. It works for some people in one, and for others in another. And it's okay if it doesn't feel like anything is happening for a while. It probably will, but it takes the body a while to get used to it.

KOTZUBEI: Some of the positions don't even have a tremor. Why is that?

FITZMAURICE: The arches specifically are not really tremor positions, though some people tremor a lot in them. But those positions stretch the body very productively for the voice.

KOTZUBEI: So it's just stretching? Why couldn't I just do yoga then?

FITZMAURICE: In and of itself, yoga is not useful for the voice. It's useful for the body, and it may make you aware like I like to make people aware. But a yoga breath, a breath that is controlled as usually taught in yoga, is not an actor's breath. An actor has to be a little more raw, more available, more spontaneous. And the stretches and tremors I use work specifically in physical areas that are impacted by breathing in order to develop that spontaneity.

KOTZUBEI: We seem to do a lot of work on the floor. When I'm acting, generally speaking, I'm not lying around on the floor.

FITZMAURICE: We use the floor because it's easier to isolate the breathing muscles and to focus internally. I can feel and use this or that part of my body more easily. The breathing is easier because I'm not using muscles to sustain my balance and support my body. Later you can bring yourself to standing and keep the new awareness. I like to finish every class by having people stand, to find their balance, and to feel their weight over the whole of the foot, so you can feel that connection to the ground that you've just felt in your whole body while on the floor. Then you draw the spine, by which I mean image and feel the spine, what I call "see/feel", and think of it as raising you, as resisting gravity. I do this little nod "yes," then "no," then "maybe," to balance the head on top of the spine. Sense the space around you, become aware of your breathing. And then you may talk, or move into the space. So all of the awarenesses on the floor are usable, both as a warm-up and to give you a sense of balance and being centered and grounded.

KOTZUBEI: You talk about using this as a warm-up. Other than warming up the body and vocal cords, what does that mean?

FITZMAURICE: It brings you into focus, where you need to be in order to work, to think the thoughts and image the images you need, to bring your attention where it needs to go. With a vocal warm up, you can do a fifteen second version, a three minute version, a twenty minute version, or it can take two hours. You do it for as long as whatever your need is.

KOTZUBEI: In Deconstructing, that is to say, in these trembling and stretching positions, what should I focus on? I could focus on my body position, on the part of my body that is shaking or being stretched, on my breath, the vibration of my sound, on communicating.

FITZMAURICE: On gravity and the feeling of the sound. I take people through about five things in the positions: first, what is the position and get into it. The second thing is what can I release into gravity in that position.

KOTZUBEI: When you said release into gravity, what do you mean by release?

FITZMAURICE: If I'm lying on my side, and I let go, my jaw is going to drop very slightly down to the side, towards the floor. My tongue, too. And my ribs, and everything. So what you learn to do is to be aware of gravity, and you learn to use your muscles with exceptional economy. So you're doing as little as possible, and therefore you achieve a much more focused, graceful, and effective result.

Let's get back to the five things. The first two were finding the position and then releasing into gravity. The third thing is how does that affect my breathing pattern. Not can I move my breathing in any particular way, but observe what actually is. Don't try to fix it, don't hinder it, don't help it, it ain't broke. Just let it do something different because you're in a different position. The fourth thing is to let sound into that breathing pattern. You're not breathing and making sound in spite of the position, but you breathe and make sound because of, as a result of, the position, in the way that the position dictates. And the fifth thing is to feel that sound wherever it may be buzzing you. And you will feel it in different places, some are more subtle. Like right now, I can feel it in my legs and I'm not making a lot of noise.

KOTZUBEI: So when you say pay attention to feeling, do you mainly mean the vibration of sound, or emotions too, or sensations throughout the body?

FITZMAURICE: Pay attention to the sensation of the sound, the vibration. In the beginning that's often more accessible than the other places you can focus your attention: the breath, the breathing pattern, releasing into gravity, etc.

KOTZUBEI: So do you try to make sound in a way that increases the vibration?

FITZMAURICE: That will happen naturally, but I don't want you to drive the voice into the resonators. That driving can be a form of pushing which limits spontaneity. The vibration will increase as the tremor frees up the body, frees up the breathing. That results in a kind of invitation to the listener, rather than saying, "Hey look at me, listen to me, I've got a good voice."

KOTZUBEI: So, when you talk about making sound, feeling vibration, am I supposed to make any kind of special sound?

FITZMAURICE: No, just whatever it is. Don't try to make a good sound. Don't sustain the sound or try to make it loud. I call it "fluffy" sound, when the vocal cords are only semi-approximated. Stay with the rhythm of the breathing that has already established itself in the position. Stay aware of gravity and you will feel if you're squeezing something and then see if you can let it go, but don't try to manipulate the sound.

KOTZUBEI: So, if I have an impulse for something to squeeze, should I stop that impulse?

FITZMAURICE: Not at this point, no. Not in the beginning. There is a difference between becoming aware of squeeze and letting it go, and stopping the impulse to squeeze. When you know what you're doing, and you feel an old habit, then you can monitor something like

that, yes. But in the beginning just go with what is. The more you do that, the more the efforts which are a hindrance or irrelevant will tend to fall away.

KOTZUBEI: Can you say more about feeling the vibration of my voice?

FITZMAURICE: I want you to develop a relationship with your voice in which you actually feel the vibration, you don't just hear it. Hearing is simply very localized sensation in the ear, which is very sensitive. But in fact the whole body, in a sense, can hear, by feeling vocal vibrations.

KOTZUBEI: So why would it help me to feel my vibration?

FITZMAURICE: First of all, it's pleasurable for you. Secondly, it's a better communicative tool because your audience hears more of you, literally. You give more of yourself when you speak.

KOTZUBEI: Because I can feel it?

FITZMAURICE: No, not necessarily. But as your voice vibrates more fully through your whole body, it involves more of you and it impacts more of the hearer's body. Just as two strings of the same length that are next to each other can impact each other. If one is made to vibrate, the other will also vibrate. It's called sympathetic vibration. So, if your body is vibrating everywhere, the audience will, in hearing it, vibrate sympathetically or, rather, empathetically, with you. That's a key, key thing in voice work. And it's why people love working in live theatre and why people love to go to live theatre. Because when the voice is not amplified, and the audience doesn't have to hear it through a square box, where the vibration would be limited, they can hear your body by feeling your body's vibrations. You emit sound vibrations towards the audience and that touches them, literally.

KOTZUBEI: Even if the audience is not aware of it?

FITZMAURICE: Even if they're not consciously aware of it.

KOTZUBEI: You've just talked about feeling vocal vibration, but you also talk about feeling energy in the body. Can you say more about that?

FITZMAURICE: Feeling the energy of the body is different from feeling the movement of the body. It is more neurological than muscular, and perhaps beyond neurological. Put your hands with your palms facing each other about six inches apart. Close your eyes. And then slowly bring your palms together, not quite touching, then draw them apart. Do that a few times. Doesn't it feel like you're squashing something?

KOTZUBEI: Hard to tell.

FITZMAURICE: Okay, can you feel the heat from your body in your hands? Heat is energy. What this work does, as a side-effect or as a by-product, is the body becomes full of energy. It's kind of like plugging yourself in, charging yourself, and you literally warm up the body. Your temperature changes, and you may feel it as a flow of temperature, you may blush or feel hot in your extremities, and there are more subtle aspects to that energy flow which you may or may not feel immediately.

KOTZUBEI: Other than literally warming me up is there any benefit to feeling that energy?

FITZMAURICE: That awareness of energy helps you free up places you're blocked in your body.

KOTZUBEI: What if instead of feeling energy I feel like my limbs go to sleep?

FITZMAURICE: That often precedes a burst of energy. You know that when a limb falls asleep because you've been sitting on it, you stop feeling it. As it wakes up you start to feel pins and needles. When you can actually feel that it's numb, that means energy and sensation are beginning to come back into it. So, when doing this work, if a part of your body *feels* asleep, that's actually progress. To know that it's asleep is the beginnings of awareness. Does that make sense to you? And if you stay in the position (you don't have to but if you can) the energy flow becomes stronger than the old decision in the body to hold against it. It will flow in and you'll feel pins and needles, which is the beginning of energy coming back. You'll feel heat, little boiling bubbles of heat. The sensation of numbness can also be related to oxygen levels in the body. We can talk about that another time.

KOTZUBEI: Sometimes, after tremoring, the main thing that I feel is spaced-out.

FITZMAURICE: I think that's a preliminary stage. I think later you'll find that it makes you alert. What you're doing in the beginning is releasing a lot of what I call coffee energy, top energy, that kind of uptightness which says "Hey! I'm so well today!" It's useful for comedy, or it's useful to play in comedy, but it's not a useful place to be all the time. You don't want to use this false bonhomie, you want to come from a more real, internal place as an actor. In that state you can listen to other people and react more accurately.

All of this is about listening, actually. Even the feeling into your own vibration is about listening in to yourself. As you become more capable of feeling your own vibration you become capable of feeling other actors' vibrations. We use the term "vibration" in a very loose way colloquially: "Oh that person has a good vibe or bad vibe." But I actually mean you become more empathetic, you understand people better, you can hear what they're saying, and you can respond to it better. Life becomes more complex, but in a way, also more easy.

KOTZUBEI: What about being bored, irritated, and wanting to stop?

FITZMAURICE: If I'm working individually with you, in the beginning I will probably do something more active with you so you stay engaged. Later it can be valuable to go through boredom.

KOTZUBEI: Why is going through boredom valuable?

FITZMAURICE: Often boredom is an impatience with how you feel. There's a low, almost unconscious, level of irritation or anxiety in the body. So you disengage, become bored. But if you're willing to feel what's going on, to let go of all that unconscious effort that's determined not to experience what's actually happening in the body or emotionally, that can lead to great opening.

KOTZUBEI: What if I'm conscious of what I'm feeling and what I'm feeling is sheer frustration?

FITZMAURICE: Each of our basic emotions actually involves a flow of energy in a specific direction through the body. In anger that energy runs up the back: think of the fur bristling on a dog's neck as it growls. Its hackles rise. Sometimes, when the energy reaches our neck, the back of our neck tightens against that energy flow, so the feeling doesn't quite

make it into the head, and we don't acknowledge the anger. That's frustration. So it's a question of allowing energy up the back of the neck and into the head. You then feel the warmth, feel the heat in the neck and into the head. You allow it to affect you.

KOTZUBEI: But what if that's really uncomfortable?

FITZMAURICE: Generally speaking, the flow of energy through the body is pleasurable. So whatever discomfort you may be experiencing is exactly in those areas where you have holding, and the tremor and breathing will help you release there, after you have brought awareness there.

You've got to learn to distinguish between physical pain which requires you to stop and address it, and something which is valuable to go through. People are not afraid of basic physical discomfort during or after what they think of as physical exercise, but when they come into a voice class and something's uncomfortable, they sometimes assume something's wrong. But it's just your body, too. Your goal shouldn't be merely to avoid discomfort, but at the same time you're not trying to push yourself into an injury. For instance, if your knees are hurting, or any joint, then that's not what this is about, it's not helpful and you could injure yourself.

It's the same with an emotion. You shouldn't feel emotionally unsafe doing this work. You need to pace yourself completely. I'm not going to ask you to stay in something, really open up your breathing, go through it, unless I know you pretty well, and you have a feel for the work, at which point you will want to challenge yourself.

KOTZUBEI: What does my breath have to do with my voice?

FITZMAURICE: The breathing is the primary energy for the voice. If I want to make sound, the physics of sound-making requires three elements: energy, which is called the source, something to vibrate, and then a resonator. For instance, if I want to play a musical instrument, it can't play itself. It just sits there. Nothing happens at all unless I use it, say, hit a drum with my hand. So there the source of energy is my hand. The drum skin receives the blow, and then the structure of the drum and the skin and the air contained within the structure vibrate. You can actually feel the vibration. And that's what my eardrum responds to. The drum vibrates and I hear it.

KOTZUBEI: Besides the breath being the energy source of the voice, why is it so important?

FITZMAURICE: Well, the energy source is very important, but it's much more than that. Because the way you breathe, and where in the body you breathe, and the timing of the breathing, and whether or not you hold your breathing in any way, and whether or not you're breathing much at all, impacts not only the quality of your voice, but also the quality of your intelligent speaking and your text work. If, for instance, your brain is going a mile a minute and you're not taking time to breathe, you're not taking time to let anybody really hear or feel what you're saying.

KOTZUBEI: But what if that's my character?

FITZMAURICE: That may be your character, yes, but you can be a healthy actor inside an unhealthy character. And, if you're not, you may get into trouble, you may lose your voice if you're working it in such a strange "character" way that you're not taking care of yourself.

There needs to be a balance between the healthy actor and the character. Otherwise, you can injure yourself.

KOTZUBEI: How could I injure myself?

FITZMAURICE: Because if the musical instrument had to contort itself to play itself, it would probably injure itself. If I wasn't using my hand to play the drum, if instead the drum had consciousness and it was trying to play itself, it would have to fold over and turn inside out and beat itself up. And that is sort of what you might do to your vocal folds.

KOTZUBEI: So if my hand is hitting the drum with very little energy, but I need to make a big sound, something else is going to have to work to make it happen?

FITZMAURICE: Yes. But it's better if it's only your hand, which in terms of the voice means more breath.

KOTZUBEI: So other than loudness, how does breath affect my voice?

FITZMAURICE: Where you breathe affects the areas of your body that are going to resonate. If I hold my body tight I don't get a very full voice out, maybe just head resonance. If I'm really breathing, you can hear that more of my body is resonating. Now what many lay people hear is a higher or a lower voice. But actually that difference is often not a pitch change. It's harmonics, an element of resonance. So a very sharp high sound, which becomes very annoying if you do it too long, is a function of not breathing and not opening the body to resonance.

When you know about the voice, you don't hear it as a pitch issue, you hear it as a resonance issue. Held breath diminishes resonance in the body. And the breath relates to just about everything: our thoughts, our feelings, our muscular actions and tensions, they all affect our breath. And it works both ways: our breath also affects our thoughts, our feelings, etc. When you open the breathing, you begin to allow more resonance and more expressivity.

KOTZUBEI: What about somebody who talks with a lot of body resonance, but little head resonance?

FITZMAURICE: The tremor work balances that. It's like water, it goes where it's needed. If some area's not vibrant it makes it vibrant. The tremor eventually goes through the whole body, including the head, and the muscles release, and the resonance balances. So there are positions I use to bring resonance into the head, and there are positions I use to bring resonance into the body.

KOTZUBEI: Can you give me an example?

FITZMAURICE: The legs over the head, in the pose which is adapted from the yoga plough pose, brings resonance into the head, but it also opens the back. But actually it's different for different people. I look at an individual body and begin to see where it's holding, where it's inhibiting its own breath flow and resonance, and suggest a position which would help the body open up there.

KOTZUBEI: One of the things I notice when something opens up, or sometimes just when I'm trembling, is that different emotions come up. Can you say something about that?

FITZMAURICE: Emotion is a movement of energy. Emotion is a name we give to various physical sensations in the body because they go beyond the physical and have a psychological component, and we tend to judge them as either good or bad. Sadness, anger, fear, and joy are the four major emotions. Each of these emotions which we sometimes think of as abstractions in actual fact has a physical component, a specific physical component in the body. And the tremor, when it brings energy into those specific physical areas, activates what feels like the emotion. So our body might cry simply because it wants to and needs to because we've been holding for so long, but we won't necessarily think of ourselves as sad or have a memory of a sad time.

And then again, you might feel sad. We tend to hold emotion in our bodies in places that have tightened to the point of becoming unconscious. When those deep tensions release, energy that was blocked there also releases and we feel the previously held emotion. You'll probably feel great afterwards if you let it happen, because it flows out and through, and the energy in the body equalizes again.

But I discourage my students from getting into a groove where they think it's cool to emote and they just go on emoting in the same way. They get into a groove, feeling something, and just continue to express that. Now expressing is obviously a large part of what we do with voice, but you want to let it be completely spontaneous and in the moment rather than thinking "This is my expectation of what will happen to me when I tremor and therefore I'll go there very quickly and start expressing without really letting the energy direct me."

KOTZUBEI: So in Deconstructing, the goal isn't to try to be emotional, but to let whatever happens happen?

FITZMAURICE: Yes. Emotion is only a by-product. But it's okay for you to get emotional. You shouldn't suppress that. And it's also okay if the person next to you isn't. It's not a problem not to get emotional in this work. Some people work for years and never get emotional.

KOTZUBEI: If it's not that important that I have an emotional reaction, and I've even heard you say that it's not important that I tremor, then what is fundamentally important?

FITZMAURICE: What is fundamentally important is self-awareness, specifically of the breathing, not in controlling it, but in seeing what it is, because it is the dynamic for everything in its function as a bridge between your creative imagination, your mind, who you are as yourself or as the character, and your communication of all of that. That's one of the main things that breathing is. It's the interfacing of your mind, your body, and the audience. It's what puts these all into a single shared moment.

KOTZUBEI: What is the line between awareness of breathing and self-consciousness of breathing?

FITZMAURICE: Self-awareness and self-consciousness are not the same thing. Self-consciousness means you're judging what's happening to you, and self-awareness is just experiencing and observing what is.

KOTZUBEI: Why is the awareness helpful?

FITZMAURICE: Awareness for any artist, or for any actor, or for any person, is a good thing to have. Why? Because the more you know yourself the more of yourself you can

bring to your work. The more you understand a character you're asked to play, the more you understand where the character comes from and the interactions of this character, or the character's arc within the play, and how the whole piece works as a framed portrayal of human behavior. You understand all human behavior better by developing self-awareness.

KOTZUBEI: Why do you say don't control the breath?

FITZMAURICE: Because through the autonomic breathing that the tremor induces in Destructuring, you want to let the breath find its own way out of the cage your particular habits have put it into. You can't really dictate the timing of that, though I can help you with it. It takes its sweet time to undo years of habit. In Destructuring, we're unlearning our breathing habits. But we have an advantage. The body already knows how to breathe if you just let it find its way past old habits. It was our first independent action after we were born, that and then making sound.

KOTZUBEI: Are there any common traps in Destructuring?

FITZMAURICE: One of the traps is to think that the position and the tremor is what this work is about. Some students tremor away with no regard for whether they're releasing, or how they're breathing, or how the breathing is creating sound. The real work is to find release, to develop awareness, and the other things I've already mentioned.

There is another related issue: actually creating more tension while doing the work. Sometimes, for instance, in the *legs up in the air* position, the knees lean away from the head and torso, so the belly works to hold the legs up, and therefore the neck and chest become tight. The effect is that while a student is tremoring in one place they are holding on in another. That's not useful. The work is to see if you can allow that energy flow-through. Often, as that flow starts, students can confuse feeling the movement of energy with tension. In that case, your goal isn't to get rid of the feeling, it's to allow it, to allow it to affect you.

There's another related issue. Sometimes students will tremor away and make huge sounds, sometimes very exciting sounds. They want to be overly emotional, or dramatic, or to make sounds that approximate the expression of strong emotion. There's a lot of noise, but they don't release, they push, and very often they sustain these sounds without paying any attention to how the body wants to breathe. But of course it's good to make full sounds when it's not pushed, when it's coming from the whole body and it's organic, spontaneous.

KOTZUBEI: If I'm just making these spontaneous, organic sounds, how does this relate to working on text?

FITZMAURICE: It makes your text work more spontaneous. The idea is expressed more spontaneously, with more impulse and fullness of persona. Instead of the voice being used simply to express a concept, so that I understand particular sounds as standing for something, the voice becomes more expressive by becoming more tonally various, using more inflection, more pitch difference, and more rate difference. Meaning becomes more complex. At the same time, and this is crucial, it's more centered in the person's own images and emotions. It relates more to your own truth.

And you've got to move from the floor work, from self awareness to communication. In the end this is all about listening and responding, about communication. Talking is a large part of acting. It's a very large part of acting. Plays are basically words. Acting is about finding

the inner truth of the words. That's where Restructuring comes in, when you're using your voice to communicate.

To introduce Restructuring, I sometimes put people into one of the positions, such as the pelvic lift. And I ask them to speak about things that I know they'll both image and really know. It's not even imagination, it's just imaging. I ask them how they got from their house to the studio, I ask them to tell me what they've eaten today, or when they were last in touch with a family member. Little, personal things. I don't even have to hear them individually, the group can all do this at once.

They're on their backs in the pelvic lift, and the breathing, almost 100%, is a Restructured breath. They don't know they're doing it, but you'll see them doing it. But this does not happen so readily in a couple of different situations. One of them is standing upright, the breathing isn't as easy when you're upright. The other is when you're saying someone else's words. There may be no imaging, no feeling connection, no motivation, you're just saying the words. Therefore there isn't this natural breathing component in what's being said. So you may not structure the breath then.

KOTZUBEI: What's the basic idea of structuring?

FITZMAURICE: On one level, it's discovering what is healthy, efficient vocal functioning, and on another level, it is integrating the mind, body, and expression. It integrates them. If you're a fairly open person, that happens naturally when the body is relaxed and you're talking about stuff you know and care about.

KOTZUBEI: But structuring seems very technical. What if it's not something my body does habitually?

FITZMAURICE: Well it frequently does happen, as I said, in the situation above, lying on your back and talking about something you are imaging. But you need to learn how to do it in situations where it is not likely to just happen: when you're doing a play, or standing. It's also crucial when you're fighting on stage or you need to be very loud. Your body needs to know how to do it in situations where it might not happen ordinarily. And initially this requires conscious control, i.e. Restructuring.

KOTZUBEI: What specifically does Restructuring involve?

FITZMAURICE: Restructuring is a combination of imaging, breath, and intention. The goal is to have a supported voice which communicates well and is spontaneous.

The idea of support is simple. There needs to be some muscular action in order to get enough air pressure—technically "sub-glottal pressure—to vibrate the vocal cords. To get that air pressure most efficiently—to support the voice—and allow for maximum resonance and connection, you tuck in the tummy at the beginning of the exhale.

A whole structured breath looks like this: on the inhale, you open the ribs sideways at the lower third of the rib cage and release the belly. On the exhale, you tuck the tummy in as you speak and let the ribs float down slowly.

Actually, as I said, this is what very connected speakers tend to do naturally. But most of us require training. So we unlearn breathing habits in the Destructuring, and then we learn new habits in the Restructuring. First you learn how to structure consciously, then you learn how to marry that to your spontaneous impulses to breathe and speak, then you learn to forget it and let it happen.

Let's get more specific about how the structured breath works. On the inhale, you open the ribs sideways at the lower third of the rib cage rather than heaving the breath into the upper chest where the lungs are small or pushing the belly forward where there's no air at all. If you're not rigid but flowing, or if you're excited, the upper chest does move. But as you practice, the place you want to initiate the conscious movement in is the lower third of the ribcage, where the ribs are no longer joined to the sternum in front. And you release the belly, rather than pushing the belly out.

Then, at the start of the exhale, as you initiate sound, you tuck in the deepest layer of the stomach muscles, the transversus, for support. As you start to tuck the belly, don't let the ribs collapse. Instead, let the ribs float down as you speak. (I should also say that when people need to make a lot of noise, when they're shouting for instance, I teach them to imagine that they're still breathing in with their ribs as they make that noise.)

Normally speaking, when the belly pulls in at the start of the exhale, the ribs tend to react for a moment by opening further, then they float back down as you speak. If the ribs squeeze together at the start of the exhale, then you're probably engaging your internal intercostals under your ribs, or using your obliques or rectus too much.

KOTZUBEI: Can you be more specific about what you mean by pulling in my belly on the exhale?

FITZMAURICE: What you do is engage that muscle, the deep layer of that abdominal muscle, the transversus. It's not the rectus, which gives you the six-pack, and it's not the obliques, which you might cough with. There's an even deeper layer of muscle, which often doesn't get used at all, because what it's mainly used for is to compress the contents of the tummy. Sometimes people pull it in just to make themselves look thin.

We tuck it in on the exhale, and that's how we "support" the voice. That's like the hand slapping the drum really effectively because the belly gives enough oomph to the breath flow to vibrate the vocal cords. Squeezing the ribs in creates too much sub-glottal pressure and so the neck tightens to resist it.

This supported, structured exhale is not the same as when we are simply releasing an exhale without sound (or with fluffy sound when we are Deconstructing). When we speak to communicate, we are overriding the autonomic need for breath—we're not only breathing because we need oxygen or need to get rid of carbon dioxide. We breathe because we have something we want to express, and it's a different muscular action with a different timing. The central nervous system, that is the nervous system which allows for intentional control, overrides the autonomic breathing pattern for the inhale and for the exhale. This is key. This is where many of our learned habits come into play. Habits which aren't necessarily helpful. So, in effect, with Restructuring, we retrain our central nervous system how to breathe when we speak.

By initiating the inhale in the lower third of the ribs, you get air more deeply and efficiently, and open the resonator more fully. On the exhale you need to get the breath flowing sufficiently to make sound. That's why you actively engage the deepest layer of the abdominal muscle.

This is important for a few reasons. When the support comes from your belly, it means you touch your center every time you speak. And if the support doesn't come from there, it means you're squeezing the ribs or perhaps in the neck to get adequate sub-glottal pressure to make sound. When you do that, you limit your resonance, you can run out of breath

more quickly, you don't speak from your center, it will be harder to convey deep emotion, and you might physically hurt yourself.

KOTZUBEI: How is it that I touch my center then?

FITZMAURICE: The belly is your center. It's not just your psychological center, or your metaphysical center. It's your geometric, physical center. It's right in the middle of you. So it's not an abstraction or a metaphor, to be "centered." You literally come from your center when you use this work. Physically, your center initiates the exhale, your speaking. Now I work with the spine too in this work because, every gesture, every action, every intention, in a sense, needs to come from the spine.

KOTZUBEI: What does the spine have to do with voice?

FITZMAURICE: The spine has to do with you, and your voice has to do with you. Your spine is your internal structure, it supports you when you're upright. It also houses the spinal cord, a very important part of your nervous system. The motor nerves get their messages through the spine and the sensory nerves send messages through the spine. It's very important. In various exercises I do, you can literally feel that when you're coming from the spine rather than the limbs, the physical gesture or action is more integrated and graceful.

Specifically for the voice, I use the spine for a part of Restructuring. I use the spine in what I call the "focus line." Once you've gotten in touch with the breath and are using it productively for sound making, I don't like to think of the breathing anymore, the actual physical actions of it. I don't want you to think of the breath as just a pump. It's not "Breathe in, exhale and whoosh out comes sound." You use the energy and the subtle efforts of all of that, and then you just think of the dynamic energy of the breathing, and therefore of the voice, and instead of thinking up and out through the breath tract, you run a line from that dynamic centered support action of the belly down around the groin, up the spine, literally through the spine, up into the center of the head and out the third eye towards a point of communication, so that it uses all the virility or femininity or sensuality of the pelvis, it uses the power of the back of the torso and the emotional availability of its front, as the spine holds it up, and it uses the brain as well, so all of these are elements of communicating.

KOTZUBEI: Is that just an image I have? How do I actually, practically do that?

FITZMAURICE: I get people to draw the spine, i.e. to image it and feel it. That's another thing I deal with, synesthesia, the ability to see and feel at the same time. The scientific word for this is proprioception. It is teachable. Try it now. Close your eyes, and hold your hands out. Don't think of your hands as a photograph on the table, but think of them where they are, and see if you can see the palms of your hands. Now if you do that, you will get sensation. Do you have sensation? Well, you can do that with every single part of your body. I do it with the face and inside the throat. I do it with the soles of the feet because you need connection with the ground when you stand up. That's called being grounded. When people's energy is lifted up mainly into the head they don't really seem to be present.

KOTZUBEI: So, going back to the spine, so I feel my spine. How does that help me?

FITZMAURICE: You run the voice around it, and that helps to keep the resonance more dimensional with fuller harmonics.

KOTZUBEI: So in structuring, do I stand there and imagine my voice moving down into my groin and up my spine and out?

FITZMAURICE: Initially, yes. But of course it doesn't remain as a clear image. It's just a technique towards something which is more satisfying, which is spontaneity and presence. Spontaneity which is not ignorant, which is not limited to the habitual patterns we created growing up, and which has gone through the fire of awareness.

KOTZUBEI: How long does it take doing this work before I would get real benefit?

FITZMAURICE: You can get benefit in an hour, but you will get more benefit the longer you stay with it. Everybody is different so I really can't say. I can't even look at somebody who is beginning and say one will get a feel for this in six weeks and another won't. I can't do that. It's totally individual, and everybody regulates themselves.

KOTZUBEI: You said "Somebody who is beginning." How long is the beginning?

FITZMAURICE: I have people working for six weeks to ten weeks, maybe a few times a week, or in a five-day workshop, and then they either want to go on or they don't. Some people stay with me for years, some people don't. I've been doing this for over thirty-five years. It's still interesting to me.

KOTZUBEI: How much do I have to do it each week?

FITZMAURICE: It's totally up to you, it's self-regulatory. If you like it, you can do it every day from one minute to an hour. If you just want to take advantage of the class, come to the class and do it. But you'll get more out of the class if you practice at home. I would recommend that you do say twenty minutes a day. That would be a recommendation, but it's not a requirement.

KOTZUBEI: If I do twenty minutes a day, should I do specific things or could it be any of the work?

FITZMAURICE: Start by choosing one to three of the positions that you like or that are interesting for you, and go through the five instructions: i.e. know what the efforts for the position are, find the releases into gravity, how that affects your breathing, let sound into that breathing pattern, and feel the sound. Then try getting up, feeling the releases you felt on the floor, get yourself centered, and if you've learned Restructuring, do some of that.

KOTZUBEI: When I do the work, how do I know I'm improving?

FITZMAURICE: You'll get to be more aware of your own vocal functioning, more confident with text work and in acting situations, and become freer to express imaginatively and emotionally, even though we haven't explicitly worked on emotion, and you'll be more aware of how other people use their voices. You'll hear more fully, and you'll be able to respond more clearly and fully to other people's communications.

KOTZUBEI: Will my specific vocal problems disappear?

FITZMAURICE: They will tend to disappear over time. In identifying the problem, you can learn what to do about it. Many people, though, become so obsessed about their problem, that avoiding the problem becomes the vocal work, instead of just doing what you need to do for efficient vocal functioning. That means you use the breathing correctly -- I mean spontaneously and efficiently -- and then many vocal problems tend to go away.

KOTZUBEI: How does your work relate to other voice teachers' work? Is it compatible?

FITZMAURICE: I think it's compatible. There are some things I say which are probably incompatible, but I still think you can study with more than one voice teacher. Take what you like and what works for you. The major difference that I find is in my teaching the Restructuring and my emphasis on distinguishing between autonomic and intentional behaviors. Sometimes students come to me who can make wonderful sound, but it's not a very adaptable sound. You hear the voice and there are words on top of that, but the voice doesn't change as the words change. You don't want to hear the voice so much as hear the person, hear their message.

KOTZUBEI: Is there anything else you want to add?

FITZMAURICE: No. Go do it.