

# FITZMAURICE VOICEWORK

*Reach into the human mind and emotions*

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## Abstract

*Fitzmaurice Voicework, as its name clearly states, was created as a way to help actors free their voice without tension and deliver performances rich in variety and authenticity of expression. But through years of teaching, that wasn't all Catherine Fitzmaurice's students managed to achieve. Her work with the Autonomic Nervous System caught my attention and is what this particular paper is about. How the activation of the Autonomic Nervous System and its internal cerebral connections make Fitzmaurice Voicework not only helpful for the voice but how it is therapeutic as well.*

*Key Words: Fitzmaurice Voicework: Destructuring and Structuring; Respiration; Autonomic Nervous System; Central Nervous System; Hypothalamus; Limbic System; Emotions.*

## Resumen

*La Técnica Vocal Fitzmaurice, como su nombre claramente dice, fue creada como una forma de ayudar a actores a liberar su voz sin tensión y entregar interpretaciones ricas en variedad y autenticidad de expresión. Pero a lo largo de sus años de enseñanza ella notó que eso no era lo único que ella lograba en sus estudiantes. Su trabajo sobre el Sistema Nervioso Autónomo es lo que llamó mi atención y es sobre lo que trata particularmente este artículo. Cómo la activación del Sistema Nervioso Autónomo y sus conexiones cerebrales internas hacen que la Técnica Vocal Fitzmaurice no sea solo de gran ayuda vocal pero como a su vez es una herramienta terapéutica.*

*Palabras Clave: Técnica Vocal Fitzmaurice: Des-Estructuración y Re-Estructuración; Respiración; Sistema Nervioso Autónomo; Sistema Nervioso Central; Hipotálamo; Sistema Límbico; Emociones.*

## Introduction

As a singer and voice professional in search of improvement, I faced a technique that showed to have several points in common with what I considered to be the fundamental pillars for correct vocal emission. As I dove into the world of “Deconstructing/Restructuring,” I discovered that an actor/singer was not only capable of improving their vocal emission but also able to improve the quality of their character in terms of transmitting an emotion and of a more truthful personification.

It caught my attention that the change produced was not only in the voice but in the person; a deeper and more interior change. I started paying even more attention to what Catherine Fitzmaurice spoke and explained about her technique.

## Fitzmaurice Voicework

When she saw that her students weren't able to isolate the respiratory action from an efficient costal movement and respiratory support without producing tension, Catherine Fitzmaurice searched for methods to reduce the body tension in a more efficient and radical way instead of a more traditional work, like the Alexander Technique for instance, so that the respiratory isolation would be effortless as well as more economic, flexible and efficient.

Searching for support in authors and practices such as Wilhelm Reich, Yoga, Shiatsu, Bioenergetics and Core-Energetics among others, in her more than 30 years of teaching, Catherine Fitzmaurice has developed a vocal technique that allows the person an emotional and artistic development to communicate meaning through monitored respiration, consciously and then unconsciously.

Briefly, Fitzmaurice Voicework, based on respiration, divides into two areas: *Deconstructing* and *Restructuring*.

*Deconstructing* consists of a profound exploration of the functions of the autonomic nervous system (ANS): the spontaneous organic impulses that every actor aspires to incorporate in their acting process. A lot of unaccustomed energy, vibration waves, and ultimately relaxation flow through the body, sensitizing it to vibration and increasing feeling and consciousness. It helps respiration respond organically to the changes in mood and ideas, thus reaching a variety and complexity of meaning and eliminating an unintentionally dry, flat delivery (i). Through an auto-reflexive contact with the autonomic nervous system, the actor not only acquires a more functional vocal instrument but also gains in autonomy, authenticity and authority, that impacts social and personal behavior and aesthetic decisions.

When the autonomic movements of the “*de-structured*” respiratory muscles are less inhibited, it is easier to “*re-structure*,” introducing the traditional European respiratory techniques. After carefully integrating the unconscious patterns (ANS) with the conscious patterns (Central

Nervous System - CNS) of costal-abdominal support, speech sounds and later speech are introduced as an extension and application of the primary function of oxygenation (2). Thus, the actor is capable of managing control over time and variety of acting delivery without losing spontaneity or connection to impulse.

## Autonomic Nervous System, Hypothalamus and Limbic System

The Nervous System is divided into Central and Peripheral, but there also exists a third component in charge of the regulation of the internal medium: the Autonomic Nervous System (ANS).

The Autonomic Nervous System (ANS) is divided into two other systems: sympathetic and parasympathetic, which connect with cortical areas and that, among other functions, is in charge of the regulation of respiration.

Respiration is the physiological (automatic and involuntary) process by which the exchange of gases for the correct oxygenation of our body is produced. It is made up of two phases: inspiration and expiration, carried out by the muscular action of the diaphragm and the intercostal muscles. Being of automatic and unconscious character, it is one of the only autonomic processes that can also be controlled consciously by one's own will. The diaphragm (principal inspiratory muscle) is innervated by both the central and autonomic systems, so that when working with respiration we are capable of accessing both (conscious and unconscious).

The hypothalamus is the highest level of integration of the Endocrine and Autonomic Nervous Systems (3). The information arrives here to be processed. This information is carried to the Limbic System (particularly the Amygdala, where the emotions lie) to be processed and associated to the needs and emotional manifestations. From here they are transmitted as an answer back to the Hypothalamus and also through the Autonomic Nervous System. In this way we can see that the ANS is intrinsically bound to the emotional and neuro-vegetative responses of the individual. It is by means of the unconscious that the responses flow to the heart, lungs, trachea and to the roots of our hairs throughout our body. The information is there, but, how do we get to it? Precisely by accessing our Autonomic Nervous System and accessing our emotional state.

## Destructuring and the Autonomic Nervous System

In exploring this work and experiencing it in oneself and others, one wonders, why is it that destructuring can become such an emotional process, produce changes at muscle tone level and leave us more receptive? Beyond the changes produced and preparing the body for vocal training, what does destructuring produce internally?

This stage of the Fitzmaurice Voicework is, in my opinion, a way to connect with our Autonomic Nervous System that, as we've seen before, is connected to the Hypothalamus and it to the Limbic System, allows us a physical entrance to the emotions. By means of "tremors" the body is filled with vibrations that make connections in an electro-chemical level with the emotions that pass through the body. During Destructuring the body enters a state of vibration that produces changes in a respiratory level. It is here where the individual must let go and be taken by this vibration, and should breathe what the body requires without regulating it consciously. Thus, the body connects with the unconscious, the vibration turns deeper and runs throughout the body awakening sensations. The body is no longer as it was in the beginning but is now aligned and balanced, which is precisely from where we can go back to structuring.

## Autonomic Nervous System and Restructuring

When the body has reached a certain eutony, (stable tonicity,) we can start Restructuring. The body is active, open, free; emotions flow, the person begins this stage of the technique with another posture. It is the way to get a respiration that is correct and adapted to the needs of the interpretation and to express desire and purpose with a body free of tension. The allowed access by the Autonomic Nervous System to our emotions through the unconscious (acquired during destructuring) is now conscious and usable. The working tool, the body, is more connected than before, allowing the interpreter a more complete, variable and authentic expression and delivery.

## Conclusions

Respiration is an important part of our bodies' essential functions and allows us to live. Respiration is life and we must not omit its analysis and utilization in our work with an individual. It occurs unconsciously, but from the moment we take consciousness of it we can modify it. This ability allows us to use it for greater means than just an exchange of gas. Being tied to the Central Nervous System (conscious) we can steer inspiration and expiration to our will. Being tied to the Autonomic Nervous System (unconscious) we obtain access to the Limbic System where our emotions are found. This access allows us a personal and profound introspection of past and present sensations that are part and grounds of our personality.

Working with respiration allows not only physical work but also therapeutic work at a psychological level. In it underlies emotions and personality. By means of Fitzmaurice Voicework, we are capable of accessing such emotions and thoughts, identify them and use them in interpretation. But not only can we use them to interpret a role but identify them supposes a big step towards knowing oneself. An individual that knows himself is capable of delivering a much more enriched role by his own knowledge.

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