

The Need for Words: Voice and the Text, 2nd Edition

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BOOK REVIEW

The Need for Words: Voice and the Text, 2nd Edition, by Patsy Rodenburg, U.S., Bloomsbury, 2018, 272 pp., \$23.99 (paperback), ISBN 9780878300518

Patsy Rodenburg's 2018 publication of *The Need for Words: Voice and the Text*, 2nd Edition dives into the current dilemma in our world's use of language and communication. Rodenburg, a prominent voice coach in the UK, shares an in-depth account of how we speak, what we speak, and the profound power of words. The six chapters of the book create a coherent arc. Rodenburg explores our personal use of language as it connects to family and cultural binding as a necessary foundation for the actor's preparation for speaking text.

Ultimately, she addresses the lack of "oracy" (the ability to express oneself well), and she speaks to the chaotic state of modern conversational habits. "We have stopped talking to one another. We have ceased being an oral culture. Our stories come to use in pictures. If we do not see it, we do not believe it" (21). She argues that electronic devices have connected and disconnected people, and in the contemporary world everyone must make an effort to be present and connected to those around them in speaking and communicating.

In making this claim, Part 1 of the book and the first two chapters instantly engage the reader as timely and relevant since they address the lack of speaking and listening in an age of electronic communication. Rodenburg describes a state of mind and body where confident and relaxed control allows for establishing intimacy and human connection. This is also known as "second circle energy"—one of Rodenburg's significant contributions to the world of voice and speech, which she explores in detail in previous books. Building on this idea, Rodenburg explores in this current book how life can be hectic and how connected communication does not always occur. For example, it is now common to schedule meetings and appointments with devices, in an effort to carve out time to share the human need for words. Rodenburg reinforces this common disconnection: "Often this basic need for words is only satisfied privately with an intimate friend, perhaps with a therapist or even in organized sessions of speaking, as when we go to a public meeting to speak our mind on an issue" (21).

In chapter 3, she reminds the reader that we are indeed living in what she calls the "Age of Cacophony and Image Saturation" (42), and in order to speak well and find the need for words, we must embody the muscles of the voice. Rodenburg believes that the first simple step to finding a connection of breath and voice and to finding a grounded body free from tension is often a hurdle for actors, students, and professional voice users of any occupation. Connecting the breath and voice first is crucial to Rodenburg, since the speaker must then connect thoughts to the voice and create the need to share words. Rodenburg offers detailed examples of the many barriers and sources of tension that are part of modern society. Rodenburg also discusses physical barriers that may hinder a voice, which can result in vocal hesitation. Methods for releasing these physical barriers are described in the text as well.

Part 2 is a progression of verbal and text exercises to assist the speaker in finding and preparing the voice. Chapter 4 serves as a foundation for shaping the voice into words and text. Chapter 5 explores the quality of word formation and spoken thoughts. This chapter details the dynamics of text work and preparing the voice and body for speaking text. Great care is given to Shakespeare's text, his use of verse and prose, his great speeches, and the

poetic power of sonnets. Rodenburg examines a lengthy list of text styles with a concise and thoughtful roadmap to unlocking each style. She gives the reader a clear sense of where to begin with even the most challenging texts. The reader will find the following: Shakespeare, Medieval verse, Christopher Marlowe, John Milton, Jacobean Drama, Age of Pope and Reason, Restoration, Wilde, Shaw, Styles, Greek tragedy, Edward Bond, William Blake, Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter, song lyrics, and bad texts (a comical account). Appropriately, she concludes with prologues and epilogues.

Breaking through tension with a connection to breath, voice, and thought is essential for any speaker. This book, then, is a great tool for actors or students to prepare the voice for speaking text and is accessible enough to be used without an instructor. The first half of the book is a solid foundation for the speaker to prepare the voice, body, and mind, and the second half builds on these ideas. This second section contains a wealth of information for any actor, director, designer, or vocal coach to obtain a better sense of style of text and how style can be explored successfully. The book has already inspired my work in the classroom to include the following exercises: “Drawing on Images,” “Clearing the Thought,” and “I Don’t Believe You.” Additionally, the book is equipped with a detailed index for quick and specific reference purposes. Moreover, Rodenburg writes about the process of voice work as if she were in the same room as her readers, leading them through each experience. This is most evident in the passage from Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. “If you want to test and improve your vocal support powers, speak any of John Milton’s magnificence verse” (204). She has a presence in her writing that engages the reader and inspires participation in her concise and effective exercises.

Ultimately, this updated edition succeeds as a useful guide for the preparation and challenges of using the voice to speak text with an understanding and ownership of words. The book’s only shortcoming is that emerging actors may not be prepared for all of the challenging work this enriching source provides. Fortunately, however, the other volumes in this series are available for those who wish to delve deeper into certain topics, and Rodenburg offers guidance on how to do so throughout the text. Voice and speech practitioners can use this book as a clear and concise guide to teach voice, speech, and text work. It serves those who speak onstage and offstage alike, and it is a practical and respectable guide for anyone wishing to express themselves more effectively as speakers.

Notes on contributor



Allison Hetzel is an Associate Professor of Voice and Acting at the University of Alabama. She recently performed her latest one-woman show *Step Mama Drama* at the 2018 Edinburgh Festival Fringe. Her vocal coaching credits include the Colorado Shakespeare Festival (2011), the New York productions of *Hell* (2012), and *Alcestis Ascending* (2013). Allison created and performed in a one-woman show titled *Considering Georgia O’Keeffe*, which she staged at the 2009/2010 Edinburgh Festival Fringe and the 2010 East to Edinburgh Festival in New York City. Allison is an Associate Teacher of Fitzmaurice Voicework and a Master Teacher of Archetypes for Actors.

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