

Happiness as a Quality of Dramatic Performance - the Chubbuck Technique: Struggle, Conflict, and Stasis

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Abstract

This article uses an investigation of the Chubbuck Technique of actor training as a springboard to argue that happiness in performance is in fact an article *of* performance. It is not an end product, a static image; it is an ongoing action. I begin with an introduction to Chubbuck's Technique that proposes the notion of *struggle* and *conflict* as areas of audience and performer interest and fulfillment. This is followed by a consideration of the idea that happiness is a by-product of the process of action-toward-goal. I argue that the concept of action-toward-goal relates to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's ontology, specifically in his discussion of the role of embodiment in creating meaning, and in the way his Fundiering model posits communication in a linear temporal sense as both sedimenting and expanding meaning within a community. I draw parallels between Merleau-Ponty's ontology and Stanislavsky's System, and link these to Chubbuck's use of Stanislavsky's linear narrative model, where scene breakdowns create a narrative structure for the character in a piece. Whilst defining Chubbuck's Technique in terms of its contextual particularity, I then argue that the through-line of contemporary performance involves the sense of happiness as an ongoing action; happiness occurs in the struggle to avoid unhappiness, rather than in the ecstatic release of attained goal. Happiness is an active state in performance, for both audience and performer. It is not static.

A Sense of Happiness: Struggle and Conflict

Ivana Chubbuck runs highly influential and well attended acting classes in Los Angeles, California and around the world, and boasts a number of celebrity actors as her students. [1] Her approach to the technique of acting will be discussed in further detail below. It is relevant at this point, however, to note that it intensifies the notion of Stanislavsky's

'Emotion Memory' as outlined in his early work (particularly *An Actor Prepares*), in a more overarching way than that promoted by Lee Strasberg's Method. Like Strasberg, Chubbuck concentrates on the *personal* (as opposed to imagined) experience of the actor as a way of bringing character to life, arguably paralleling the growing publication of individual experience seen in contemporary social networking media. Strasberg's focus, as Sharon Carnicke notes, utilized the personal to attempt to create 'real' emotion on stage, and aimed at '...the development of an ensemble with a common approach to artistic work' (1998: 49). I make the parallel between Chubbuck's technique and social networking media in reference to her emphasis on *winning* and *wanting*, which create a performance technique based largely on each individual actor/character's goals, rather than on a cast or production ensemble goal. Nevertheless, her technique is a particular, contemporary distillation of Strasberg's interpretation of the Stanislavsky System, and draws from the same Stanislavsky-based structure prevalent in much current acting pedagogy. [2] It therefore provides a good model to consider the present-day approach to happiness within mainstream Western acting practice today.

Auditing an acting class held by Chubbuck in Los Angeles, September 2010, I noted Chubbuck's comment: 'No-one wants to watch you having it easy. They want to watch you struggle'. The comment was part of a feedback session in a master-class where actors are asked to access their deepest inner emotional pain in order to 'power' a scene, and it underscores the idea I wish to develop in this article: that the process of (contemporary) acting is locked into a temporal, narrative structure, where satisfaction and happiness both as performer and audience member are linked to the *ongoing action* of performance rather than the outcome of the narrative. The resolution of a performance may well result in ecstatic release, but it is the process by which that release is attained that absorbs performer and audience. That absorption, I propose, is the sensation of happiness as a quality of performance. It is, in a phenomenological way, a continued unravelling of a shared world, such that Sara Ahmed's argument—that the risk of unhappiness opens onto possibility and transformation—can be re-constituted: the struggle against the risk of unhappiness *creates* the sensation of happiness in the action of performance. [3]

Chubbuck's technique relies on the idea of struggle and conflict. In the introduction to her book *The Power of the Actor* (2005) she writes:

If you look closely at virtually all drama and comedy—in fact, all literature—you will find that the will to win is the one constant element...you find that every character's conflict and struggle is about fighting to win whatever their goal is. (vii)

The inherent suggestion contained in the combined message of her class comment and the above quote is that audience satisfaction exists in the observation of the fight against discomfort, the fight to achieve a desired resolution not yet in place—in watching the dissatisfaction of others and their attempts to overcome it. Whether those attempts are successful or not is immaterial. It may qualify the quality of satisfaction at the end of the piece, but the overall satisfaction is in the observation of and vicarious involvement in the struggle, the fight to win. Effectively, Chubbuck suggests that happiness arises through and during the journey taken; and the journey taken is struggle-oriented. Struggle is part of the conflict of performed drama, and happiness—or satisfaction—is the by-product of this. The interest in dramatic performance for Chubbuck is not the static presentation of happiness; happiness is the tragic, serious, or comic journey toward a diminution or escape from the threat of unhappiness. In this (performance) sense, Abramovic's nostalgic, repeated vision of a traditional, domestic 'image of happiness' is static and un-engaging, [4] whilst the *doctrine* of the pursuit of happiness is flawed in its assumption of happiness as a goal to be attained, as an *end product*, rather than an active, engaged state.

I will revisit Chubbuck's technique later, using it as an example of the current vogue in mainstream acting theory, and extrapolating from that to consider the nature of happiness and dramatic performance. To lay the groundwork for this, I will look briefly at, firstly, the connection of happiness and narrative, and secondly, the role and action of language and embodiment in the ontology devised by Maurice Merleau-Ponty. I will then consider the parallels between Merleau-Ponty's ontology and Stanislavsky's System, and thereby also Chubbuck's technique, to argue that happiness within audience and performer experiences of (contemporary) theatre is based in a phenomenological approach to narrative and action.

It is the unravelling of meaning—the struggle to understand—that makes happiness a quality of performance.

Happiness, Action-Toward-Goal, and Acting

In his discussion of the idea of happiness, and the assumption in much social-science media and research that happiness can be attained through economic and material means, Richard A. Easterlin writes:

...most individuals spend a disproportionate amount of their lives working to make money, and sacrifice family life and health, domains in which aspirations remain fairly constant as actual circumstances change, and where the attainment of one's goals has a more lasting impact on happiness. (2003: 11182)

In effect, Easterlin argues, the idea of goal attainment as a measured, completed unit is not the active element of happiness; it is the direct *action* involved in working toward and maintaining goals that creates the sensation of happiness. The attainment of pecuniary goals *impacts* on happiness, but happiness itself tends to be more associated with the non-pecuniary areas of life that require consistent attention, yet are not as prone to aspirational change. The assumed material social markers of happiness that Easterlin refutes—wealth and goods—are subject to a form of hedonic adaptation: basically, the more you have, the more you want. Attainment of a goal in these domains implies stasis; the journey is over. Easterlin's aspirational happiness domains—health and family life—are active, ongoing events, and this is part of their happiness-creating potential. Michael S. Sherwin OP (2010) concurs. Tracing the idea of happiness through Platonic, Aristotelian and Stoic thought, Sherwin argues that whilst happiness is seen as "...a form of subjective satisfaction" (39), the *essence* of happiness is not in the end product, but in the action taken to achieve it. It is action-*toward*-goal that is the source of fulfillment, satisfaction and happiness—even to the level of the classic martyr figure, whose ecstatic joy is generated during the action of suffering.

Action-toward-goal assumes a linear temporal engagement with life. There is a sense of a start-and-end point toward any action with a goal in mind. Such an engagement is therefore linked with a concept of life-as-narrative. As will be argued below, lived material life, experienced through a constantly aging body, is experienced in a temporal, linear fashion, and tends to be understood as a narrative: an unravelling story with a discernible beginning, middle and (unfixed, but aimed for) end.

Dramatic narrative, and the nature of its interpretation, tends to replicate this. The linear narrative model is the underlying premise of the Western-based interpretation of Stanislavsky-style script analysis techniques taught in contemporary Western drama schools—techniques which routinely break the script down into a series of Objectives to be gained, creating a narrative structure for each character and scene. The agreed-upon meaning of the text for both the piece and each character within the piece is aimed at through a series of scene Objectives leading via a through-line toward the Overall Objective, creating a pathway for the performer/character, and also creating a slow revelation of meaning for each audience member.

It is important to note that, as Carnicke (1998) has indicated, this is a simplified, and possibly inaccurate, interpretation of the Stanislavsky system. Elizabeth R. Hapgood's ubiquitous translations of Stanislavsky's work were prone to a number of questionable omissions and translation choices. Stanislavsky questioned the idea of a single through-line, for instance, in notes from the 1930's that at the very least complicate the idea of a strict temporal progression:

Everyone thinks that the through-line is a single line, like a cable, that extends throughout the whole play. But this is not so. There are many lines, not one, which are woven together. (Stanislavsky in Carnicke, 1998: 2)

Nevertheless, as Carnicke points out, Hapgood's translations were until recently the major written reference to Stanislavsky's System outside Russia. [5] They have defined how his System has been taught and developed in the West and elsewhere.

Contemporary Stanislavsky System-based acting, then, is taught as a form of action-toward-goal, and, therefore, as based in narrative. Performance from the acting and spectating point of view is, as a result, a shared absorption in the unravelling of meaning, from which, I propose, a sense of satisfaction arises.

Embodied Narrative in Life and Performance

Genie Babb (2002), discussing performance and narrative theory, argues that a Cartesian duality of body and mind has been implicit in narrative theory since the publication of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's *Laocoön* in 1766 [6]:

Closer examination shows that embedded in Lessing and in subsequent narrative theory are dispositions towards a dualistic account of the mind/body relation.

Contemporary studies of the body challenge narrative theory to reframe conceptions of character to include the body—and ultimately to reconceive the production and consumption of narrative as not simply a mental operation, but as an embodied activity. (Babb, 2002: 197)

Babb's discussion of embodiment references Maurice Merleau-Ponty to reappraise the role of the body in narrative, and feeds into the argument that happiness as a quality of performance is an ongoing, active, *lived* event. It builds on the notion of how the embodied body operates in the world to create meaning—and therefore, I argue, to create a sense of ongoing satisfaction. In her analysis of Lessing, Babb identifies his idea of 'description' in a text or discussion as a form of stasis, and of bodily description as objectifying character and discouraging (audience/reader) identification. Implicit in that understanding is the negating of the *idea* of the 'lived body' as a form or attribute of identification and/or narrative (199). To counter this, Babb draws on Mark Johnson's work with image schemata, specifically isolating source-path-goal schema—those experiences where we launch ourselves through space to achieve a goal (chair to cupboard, for instance), taking into account all the obstacles and others along the way. Similar work has been done by R. W. Gibbs (2008), who, drawing on observations of infants showing the physical manifestations of reaching for

objects well before they have the ability to grasp them, proposes that the body works on tactile-kinesthetic interactions based on spatial, mobile relationships with the environment from an early age, continually changing the child's image-schemas as its interactions develop. Image-schemas thus allow us to understand the world through our interaction with it; they are analogical representations of space and movement that we use to 'map' the world, but rather than being encoded as 'blueprints' in a disembodied mind, they are '... emergent properties, a kind of 'structural coupling' between brain, body and world' (Gibbs, 2008: 236). They operate in an interpretational way, and so refer to past experience to attempt to anchor present experience in understood image-schematic formats, but are in constant flux as experience and body-brain-world (to use Gibbs' terminology) continue to renew and change. Cognition, or conceiving, then, is in a constant process of interaction with perception: the body is an embodied unit that is fully involved in making sense of its world. What's more, the image-schema format of learning and of interpretation is narrative based: it links events and experiences to create an ongoing, fluid and changing story of experienced life.

Extrapolating from Babb, Johnson and Gibb, the experience of embodiment can be recognized as one which is called on to recreate and/or renegotiate similar experiences when they present themselves; and to recognize or categorize new experiences through association to previous embodied experiences, with recourse to all the senses and emotions. Some implications of this to the narrative of life should seem obvious: the narrative is understood in ways according to those experiences already undergone and understood; one experience builds on another; and each body/brain unit will carry a shared yet particular understanding of the world, according to its own temporal progression. The satisfaction inherent in the understanding of the world as it begins to fit into pre-conceived schemas, or as old schemas stretch and/or new ones form, is the satisfaction of understanding one's place in the world. In a phenomenological sense, similar implications exist for the narrative of dramatic performance and happiness in such performance: the art of performing and observing happiness is in the linear, temporal unfolding of experience and meaning; the continual unravelling of phenomena.

Narrative, Linear Temporality, Language and Merleau-Ponty

If we follow and extend Babb's use of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological model, narrative linear temporality within dramatic performance can be interpreted as a performed act of intentional transcendence toward a pre-defined narrative goal. The happiness gained from narrative theatrical or filmic entertainment can then be seen as the happiness gained from the ongoing performed and audience-observed experience of this act. In effect, the development of an acting technique that engages narrative as a lived, experienced and shared act takes the reality of performed narrative—and of dramatic performance itself—away from the Cartesian duality that Babb identifies in narrative theory, to a shared experience of action-toward-goal. Monica Langer, writing in 1989, proposed that for Maurice Merleau-Ponty, perspectival temporality is something '... inseparable from being-in-the-world', and meaning is '...inseparable from the primary directionality which that primordial inherence in the world implies'; therefore Merleau-Ponty can '...declare that temporality is the meaning (sens) of our existence' (Langer, 1989: 130). Linear temporality and the unravelling of knowledge are ultimately tied together in this schema, so that the happiness quota, as it were, of a shared, performed temporal intersubjectivity becomes defined by the level of shared effort involved in revelation.

Merleau-Ponty's model of language as elaborated by Langer (1989) and M. C. Dillon (1988) gives further clarification to the idea, outlining the way in which language, as a medium of meaning that interconnects perception, self, others and world, functions to express, sediment and constantly develop knowledge and meaning. Language here refers to shared methods of communication, and I use Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological take on language to underline the narrative temporality of communication, shared meaning and, by extension, happiness as a quality of performance. In his *Phenomenology of Perception* (1962) and *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968), Merleau-Ponty's model considered language as a part of the (human) body-total, and the body as a unit in which language is both a function of, and a tool for, the interconnection of body and world. In that model, language is *based* on phenomena, on a genuine expression of or about phenomena, inspired by a significative intention, a *need* to express. Meaning emanates from the perceived world, and

language sediments itself through the communal world and through shared emotional essences within a community. Meaning, therefore, transcends its signification as the shared understanding develops; that transcendent meaning feeds back into the sedimentation *and* the original perception. Nature and culture intertwine within this model of language: they are mutual parents of the device of communication.

Language itself is situated as a vital part of what Merleau-Ponty describes as *chiasm*: that area between Other and Self that, in meeting-but-not-meeting, creates meaning. It is a little like the edit point in film; meaning built in the gap between one frame and the next. Merleau-Ponty describes the attempt to reflect on pre-reflective life and to shape it, to find the way in which we know or understand the world without prior knowledge of it, in terms of a constant re-negotiation of experience and its expression. Language allows this reflection: in attempting '...to disclose and describe the miraculous birth of meaning in pre-reflective experience' (Langer, 1989: 166), language or reflection coils back '...over that experience and, in failing to fuse with it, creates the opening which enables the same miracle to occur in philosophical expression itself' (Langer, 1989: 166). The process was contextualised in a sociological format in Merleau-Ponty's *Fundiering Model*, where perception is the founding term—that is, the first conception of the world—which gives rise to expression, which then becomes language, which itself sediments within thinking and culture to become institutionalized. This sedimented language then feeds back into, organizes, and fills with meaning and potential the original perceived.

As Dillon notes, the *Fundiering Model* was modified in *The Prose of the World* (1973) to reflect the concept of intersubjectivity and communal development:

...expression presupposes community in the institution of language...and sedimentation...being the transformation of the perceptual world by culture, clearly requires communal participation in a given way of seeing things. (Dillon, 1988: 197)

As Merleau-Ponty saw it, the Fundiering Model allowed for a continued potential of growth and development. Significant intention, the *need* the human organism has to express something that has not been expressed previously, ensures that continual growth. That which is available—language, gestural communication, art—is manipulated, organized and constructed to express a truth of the world previously hidden or only partially perceived, in a way recognizable to all as part of the culturally or universally perceived world. In this way meaning and knowledge continually grow or redefine themselves, and avoid being locked in Heidegger’s hermeneutic circle.

Language becomes the tool through which the world is expressed—whether that language is gestural, spoken, written or otherwise. Its consistent quality of evolving through the process of perception, expression, sedimentation and shared meaning gives it an embodied narrative quality: it *develops* over linear time, itself part of the performance of a metamorphosing truth. Perceptual temporality is not just the meaning of existence; it is what gives developing meaning to existence. In this sense the performance of perceptual temporality is what gives satisfaction: meaning is shared, revealed and grown. In short, we are tied into a linear engagement with the world, and tied into (at best) a continual unravelling of the ‘truth’ of the world we live in and how we relate to it, where ‘truth’ refers to our own perception of the ever-changing, consistently expanding set of perspectives, contexts, layers, dimensions and so on that make up (our) living-and-being-in-the-world. An ‘image of happiness’ assumes a final or static state; the ‘happily ever after’ of children’s fairy-tales. A phenomenology of life is always evolving, and therefore in a constant state of intentional transcendence. The performance of aspects of living, then, is the performance of aspects of that intentional transcendence: it aims toward a state of resolution—be that knowledge, change, finality or other—wherein the struggle of that journey *is* the eventual experienced, performed and audience-observed sense (as opposed to state) of happiness. That concept of performance as a constant engagement in a state of intentional transcendence is reflected in Western contemporary, active interpretations of Stanislavsky’s Method of Physical Action.

The Fundiering Model and Stanislavsky's Method of Physical Action

Life is action; that is why our lively art, which stems from life, is preponderantly active ... Scenic action is the movement from the soul to the body, from the center to the periphery, from the internal to the external, from the thing an actor feels, to its physical form. (Stanislavsky, 1980: 48-49)

Action is the motivating force of the Stanislavsky System; a belief in the essential activity of living, that must be found on stage if life is to be presented. Jean Benedetti, introducing the System, agrees:

[i]n life we are in active contact and communication the whole time with objects, other people, or, if alone with our own thoughts, with ideas and feelings. We interact with others, we think about the world. Our life is always *about* something. (Benedetti, 1998: 74)

Life is about action; life *is* action, writes Stanislavsky (Stanislavsky, 1980: 48). We are continually engaging with the world, physically and emotionally. Even the choice to isolate ourselves is an active choice. Life is a process of intersensory inter-action; in Merleau-Pontian terms, a constant dehiscence where meaning is, as it were, found in the progressive, ever new edit points. The actor portraying a role is engaging in presenting a series of pre-determined, 'new' edit points, in an ongoing transcendence toward an agreed, imagined world, derived from '...an unbroken succession of independent processes; and each of these in turn is compounded of desires or impulses aimed at the accomplishment of some objective' (Stanislavsky, 1980: 49).

In creating an analysis of the process of breaking down a script and a performance into a series of connected actions within a given world, Stanislavsky places his System into a form of guided phenomenology. The *unbroken line of objectives, super-objectives, affects* and so on are presented as if for the first time, such that the performed interactions between created world and created characters, create meaning. His insistence on the 'outside eye' of

the actor as actor leans further toward Merleau-Ponty's asymmetrical Reversibility: the knowledge that one can never *be* the Other, despite being an element of what the Other is:

This does not mean that the actor must surrender himself on the stage to some such hallucination as that when playing he should lose the sense of reality around him, to take scenery for real trees, etc. On the contrary, some part of his senses must remain free from the grip of the play to control everything that he attempts and achieves as the performer of his part. (Stanislavsky in Cole (ed) 1955: 27)

The application of the Stanislavskian System as generally understood in the West engages the actor in exercises and research that immerses them in the *given circumstances* of the project. The process allows them to personalize those circumstances—to imagine what they might do *if* they were that person, in that situation—and it presents the aims of the character in a temporal fashion with actions, objectives and super-objectives that give the character an active purpose in performance. The actor has at one and the same time entered into the perception of a previously unknown world (that of the character to be portrayed), and into the world of the performance (incorporating the specifics of performance: theatre building/performance space, set, audience, props, music and so on), in such a way as to be able to act in the latter with the pre-reflective reactions of being in the former: a familiarity with the imagined world allows the pre-reflective responses of the lived world, if the unexpected occurs in performance. The perceptual world of rehearsal has an agreed set of given circumstances, communicated in a shared world within the rehearsal period, becoming sedimented through rehearsal and, later, performance—where the meaning of the performance and the world of the characters transcends the original concepts through change, communal reactions, extra insights, and so on—all of which feeds back into the original perception of the project and of each performed character. The System is like a Merleau-Ponty Fundiering model for actors. [7]

Chubbuck and Stanislavsky

Chubbuck openly draws from Stanislavsky, though she does not define any specific reference book in her written works. Her FAQ sheet, given out to auditing visitors, states:

I teach my own process, the Chubbuck Technique, which builds on teaching traditions that stretch back to Stanislavski and infuses them with current advances in behavioral science and psychology. (Ivana Chubbuck Studio FAQ sheet: 1)

The Contents page of Part 1 of Chubbuck's *The Power of the Actor* (2005) is laid out as a chapter-by-chapter discussion of her twelve-step acting technique, and reads like a how-to manual of Stanislavsky's System. Chubbuck deals with Overall Objectives, Scene Objectives, Obstacles, Substitution, Inner Objects, Beats and Actions, the Moment Before, Place and Fourth Wall, Doings (read as Use of Objects), Inner Monologue, and Previous Circumstances. All these replicate steps from the Stanislavsky System as laid out in Hapgood's 1936 translation of his *An Actor Prepares*. Chubbuck diverges from Stanislavsky in her decision to prioritize the use of personal, unresolved emotional issues to motivate associations and objectives. Lee Strasberg also focused on the use of personal emotional memories as triggers for the actor; however Chubbuck is unique in her recommendation that the intensely personal be applied to *every* aspect of the preparatory acting process. Nevertheless, within that intensely personal field, Chubbuck's technique maintains a Stanislavskian methodology, language and structure.

Stanislavsky's System has features that parallel Merleau-Ponty's ontology—as briefly outlined above—and it is in the adherence to these features and in her intensification of some of Stanislavsky's methods that Chubbuck's Technique underlines the narrative quality of happiness within performance. The technique certainly follows a recognizable line of American interpretations of Stanislavsky from Strasberg on, and its emphasis on personal unresolved emotional problems and on the desire to *win* corresponds with aspects of popular American culture. Nevertheless, it reflects a (perhaps solipsistic) phenomenological way of being-in-the-world—and therefore takes on a narrative performance mode that does

not assume an enduring or final 'image of happiness', but rather works toward a conflict-driven and effort-based sense of happiness as an ongoing quality of performance. I propose that the Chubbuck Technique, considered in terms of both its divergences from and overall adherence to the Stanislavsky System, is representative of a widely used, contemporary form of acting which is narratively and phenomenologically based. In this form, happiness as a quality of performance is part of an action-toward-goal schemata; it is the *process* of performative achievement that creates satisfaction, fulfillment and, therefore, happiness.

Chubbuck, the Actor, and Happiness in Performance

Ivana Chubbuck attempts as far as possible to eradicate the differentiation between actor and character, in order to intensify the ongoing action of struggle. This intensification at its most successful draws actor and spectator deeply into the narrative of personal struggle that Sherwin deems the *essence* of happiness (see above). The approach taken by Chubbuck in her acting technique clearly adopts the idea of the performed sense of happiness as a narrative character journey through conflict toward resolution, or toward a diminution or escape from unhappiness. Chubbuck trains her actors to call on their own personal lives to achieve this journey. In doing so, she asks them to personalize major emotional character issues and arcs not by imagining what they might do if they were that person in that situation, but to engage in the character's journey by giving it as close and heightened a correspondence to their own lives as possible. Her twelve-step technique concentrates on using unresolved personal problems as inspiration:

I realized that an actor must identify their character's primal need, goal or OBJECTIVE. With this OBJECTIVE in mind, the actor must then find the appropriate personal pain that can effectively drive this OBJECTIVE. After working with this idea for a while, I understood that the pain must be powerful enough to inspire an actor to fearlessly commit to doing *whatever it takes* to WIN their OBJECTIVE. (Chubbuck 2004: ix)

Chubbuck maintains that audiences are essentially interested in human relationships. Therefore, objectives need to be relationship based: it is the (conflictual) negotiation of relationship that maintains interest:

...since every person is unique, *how* they negotiate and create relationships will be special and one of a kind. *How* your character attempts to win their OVERALL OBJECTIVE, which is based in an essential human need, is the journey. (Chubbuck 2004: 11)

Within that journey, the objectives need to be based in selfish choices. A character will fight to get what they want for themselves, and the threat of failure will make that fight memorable:

Always make selfish choices. We always do more to get something when it involves something for ourselves rather than for someone else...It also gives you the possibility of failure...The apprehension that your attempt at gaining your SCENE OBJECTIVE may or may not succeed keeps you anticipating the worst, and therefore you keep trying harder and harder. This takes the ordinary and turns it into the extraordinary. (Chubbuck 2004: 35)

What is being promoted as the basis for acting technique, then, is the application of personal emotional pain as a driving force to inspire script-motivated selfish objectives that each actor fights to achieve. The resulting interpersonal tussles provide ongoing conflicts that an audience can recognize, empathize with, and become involved in even as they carry the plot, whilst the actor's personal investment in the emotional reality of the scene(s) creates a recognized truth to the performance. The whole accepts as given a narrative construction of aimed-for objectives with obstacles that create conflict, and emotional performances based on real (contemporary) emotional feelings. Conflict is at the core of Chubbuck's technique—conflict not only in the plot of the piece performed, nor solely within the confines of the performance and the obstacles hindering the realization of scene and overall objectives, but within the personal life situations chosen to parallel the

performance. In this technique, the story is revealed via a plot narrative, character relationships are negotiated through fought-for objectives, and actor personalities are engaged and bared through personal character alignments that will ostensibly resonate with an audience. The conflictual journey of the piece is performed, and truly experienced, by the actor. There is a transcendent intentionality in each performance that is personally based, but that shares and ultimately changes meaning with each audience: the revelation of meaning fluctuates as each performance progresses, so that the realization of the journey for audience and performer is slightly different each time.

The scenes I observed in September 2010 were of varying intensity, ranging from the comic to the tragic. Many of them involved characters in acts of accusation and recrimination; of seduction; and of emotional outburst. At the end of each scene, the actors hugged, cried, shook hands with each other, and had a brief few moments re-living the performance before sitting down to feedback from Ms. Chubbuck. Their level of pleasure in having conducted the journey of the scene was palpable. At the same time, our level of pleasure as an audience was equally high at having seen the scene brought to life so engagingly. Audience members who knew the actors in each scene would rise up to congratulate them, and the seconds before feedback were loud with buzzing voices. In one case, two of the actors were in tears at the end of the scene (of rage for one, guilt for the other). Their tears continued post-scene, but continued as tears of happiness accompanied by beaming smiles and slightly hysterical laughter as they were congratulated by audience members, and as their perception of the success of the performance took hold. Their and our happiness, I suggest, was in the recognizable accuracy of the struggle observed, the journey taken, to get to an end point that may or may not have been conclusive, but that gave the promise of continuance. Both the acting and the watching in this case depended on the entertainment value of what we understood as the honest, truthful display of conflicting emotional states. The end result was a release; but the journey to get there provided the engagement and fulfillment. The shared audience/actor journey of struggle was the cause of happiness and/or release: the *presentation* of happiness had nothing to do with it. Abramovic's 'image of happiness' perhaps argues a similar point: the presented *state* of happiness is a fabrication that belies temporal context and continuation.

Stanislavsky's Method of Physical Action concentrates on a narrative structure, with a performance technique that builds on an investment from the actor which involves an overall goal-based end, achieved by the attaining of a step-by-step series of smaller, related goals. Chubbuck has adopted this set-up and, in her basic organizational framework, has replicated Stanislavsky's approach. The overall thrust of performance, and of audience involvement, is in the *unravelling* of narrative and of relationship interactions that make up the struggle of the narrative: in the *how* of the storyline more than the end image or the static contentment of narrative end or happy/content state. Where Chubbuck diverges is in her intense personalization of the performed world. Her technique of investing every moment with a selfishly-based objective based in true-to-the-actor desires, motivated by true-to-the-actor unresolved painful emotional memories, represents an escalation of Strasberg's use of Emotion Memory, and tends to dispose of as much of the imagined world as possible by introducing an intense parallel with the 'real' emotional world of the actor. Stanislavsky's initial major imaginary premise of 'what if' becomes so strongly individualized in Chubbuck's technique that a sense of personal narrative is created for the actor, and a sense of voyeuristic intensity for the audience—so that we engage as performer and audience in a shared, personal narrative. Where Stanislavsky's technique is a phenomenological system that still consciously recognises a Self/Other dichotomy, Chubbuck ups the ante to shape the technique of acting into the personal action of conflict, such that it becomes the experience of narrative conflict as a form of achieved sense of happiness via shared involvement in gruelling struggle. It is perilously close to using acting and viewing as therapy: though I would characterize it more in terms of painful emotional massage. There is satisfaction in the pain; happiness can be both an end-product state (of release), and an ongoing sensation through action. The 'subjective satisfaction' (Sherwin OP, 2010: 39) that can be characterized as happiness, however, is in the journey: in the struggle and conflict to avoid unhappiness.

Conclusion

I have referred to the Chubbuck Technique despite the fact that Chubbuck has built on what many regard as a common misinterpretation of Stanislavsky's *An Actor Prepares* —the

concentration on ‘emotion memory’ as a source of acting ‘truth’. [8] Her method, I propose, is relevant to and reflective of our times: highly individualistic, and aggressive in its definition of personal emotional truth and in its pursuit of ‘winning’, or personal gain (as opposed to social gain, for instance). Nevertheless, whilst Chubbuck’s Technique escalates Strasberg’s prioritization of the use of Emotion Memory, it draws heavily from Stanislavsky’s System in the use and style of script analysis. Stanislavsky’s System, I have argued, parallels Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological ontology, in the way it attempts to create a technique whereby meaning is built and added to afresh each time it is revisited, such that actor and spectator/audience member are drawn into a new, shared revelation of meaning each performance. Chubbuck represents a particular cultural and contextual interpretation of Stanislavsky’s approach. In its own way, this allows us our own cultural/contextual phenomenological engagement in an agreed, shared journey that becomes the active essence of happiness as a quality of performance. That is not to say it is a preferred or superior interpretation or engagement: merely that it suits the times in a non-confronting, culturally familiar, and therefore easily accommodated format. It involves actor and audience in an accepted, recognised journey of personal struggle toward personal gain: and it is the struggle – the action toward goal – that is the essence of happiness.

I have used Chubbuck as one example where the concept of the ‘struggle’ is clearly intensified through the teaching process, yet other performance strands also reflect the nature of struggle in an unfolding narrative, *and* in their form. In dance—specifically ballet—the seemingly effortless movements of the body are based in a masked struggle against bodily limitations. In dramatic opera, the narrative of struggle and objectives takes prominence, whilst performers’ voices are asked to achieve seemingly impossible tasks (the potential of failure perhaps part of the joy of the struggle of completion). In competitive sport, the built-in prospect of losing creates the engagement and investment of audience and performer, while in film it is the mass of interlocking techniques that suture us in to the narrative precisely to distance us from the difficulty of those techniques. It is the effort of the ongoing action of performance, of action-toward-goal—both exhibited and hidden—that engages and satisfies for both performer and spectator. The narrative structure in

terms of story and actual struggle of performance involves us in the unravelling of the journey, more than its end.

The argument presented, then, is that happiness as a quality of performance—the art of happiness *in* dramatic performance—has little to do with *images* of happiness. Performance in the dramatic theatrical sense involves narrative temporality: we are part of the structure of our lived lives and material bodies, which themselves are linked inextricably to a linear time frame. Our perceptive abilities, our creation and extension of meaning, are shaped by linear temporality. Images of happiness are static: they represent an end goal, itself representative of a ‘finished’ time period. Happiness in performance is the state or sense of journey toward that goal; toward the avoidance of or escape from unhappiness. Happiness in performance, as in life, is active.

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Endnotes

[1] Brad Pitt, Charlize Theron, Elisabeth Shue, Djimon Hounsou and Halle Berry amongst others. As a result, her classes are highly sort after.

[2] As will become evident, I use the Chubbuck technique because of its similarities to Stanislavsky's System, which remains a major acting reference around the (Western) world. I make this claim both from my own experience, and from researching the many acting schools attended by various English, Australian, Portuguese and Norwegian actors during the preparation for my dissertation *Inner Place* (2010). Chubbuck's premise of *winning*, discussed below, merits a separate article contextualising that premise in terms of American individualist ideology.

[3] See the call for papers for this Performance Paradigm issue.

[4] Abramovic's 'Image of Happiness' (1996) is a video work in which an 'image' of domestic happiness is repeated vocally by Abramovic as she hangs upside down. The visual image provides a stark contrast to the spoken. The static, un-engaging nature of both the visual and the repeated vocal image are themselves in conflict with the idea of an 'image of happiness'.

[5] Carnicke (1998) notes that Elizabeth R. Hapgood's translations are prone to various omissions and mis-translations; but also notes that they became the accepted version of Stanislavsky's books outside of Russia:

'In sum, the commercial pressure that retouched Stanislavsky's books in the US extended throughout most of the West and even into Asia through Japan, wherever translations were made from English. This publication and translation history means that Hapgood's choices in terminology and style together with the publisher's editorial decisions determined the dominant form for Stanislavsky's ideas outside Russia with the result that *An Actor Prepares*, *Building a Character* and *Creating a Role* – the "ABC's" of acting – became definitive editions. Furthermore, because Hapgood's

decisions also entered the lore of acting, the “ABC’s” continue to shape Western assumptions about the System. For example, contemporary actor’s recognize “objective” (her translation of *zadacha*) even though Strasberg actually used the more standard translations of “problem: and “task” (Chapter 4). Her usage has become actors’ common coin’ (Carnicke, 1998: 82)

[6] Babb explains that Lessing creates a distinction between poetry and painting, such that the body is part of the “representational space of painting and description”, whilst character is part of the “other qualities” which are implicit rather than explicit (Babb, 2002: 196).

[7] For a more detailed discussion of the parallels between Merleau-Ponty’s ontology and Stanislavsky’s Method of Physical Action, see my dissertation *Inner Place: the Impact of Embodied Landscape on Actor Decisions in Rehearsal – An Actor’s Perspective* (2010).

[8] See Whyman (2008); Krasner (2000); and Hirsch (1984), amongst many others. Hirsch in particular points out the contextual prescribed manner of ‘emotional truth’ and its performed presentation, outlining the ubiquitous ‘language’ of Strasberg’s Method in comparison to, for example, Stella Adler’s technique.

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