

THE OBJECT EXERCISES

3. To discover how my sense of identity changes hourly, depending on needs, surroundings and circumstances, and that these variations in sense of self can be usable for character.
4. To realize what elements are essential in order to bring about two minutes of existence.

I am starting to fill a warehouse for future use in the parts I still hope to play.

16

TALKING TO YOURSELF

THE MONOLOGUE—that old fossil—which has appeared in so many different forms in dramatic literature has always depended on the form that was favored at the time. From century to century, it has adjusted or been cut to fit a current mode of the theater. Whatever its form, it is and has always been a character talking to himself out loud, or to absent characters, or to objects surrounding him at a given time in a given place for a specific reason at a moment of crisis. Whether the emphasis be on the naturalistic or one of selective realism, it is always dependent on whether the relevant content is emotional, psychological, philosophical, poetical, or an amalgam of more than one. Whether the monologue deals with plot or character problems (even if by the author's graces the character is allowed in his eloquence to know more about himself than he actually might in life), or even if the character talks aloud to himself because he is insane, a monologue will always be words representing the character's thoughts or a part of his thoughts. Sometimes it is even the actor's job to persuade himself—and the audience—that these words, or some of them, might actually be inaudible in spite

THE OBJECT EXERCISES

of the fact that they must be heard in the last row of the balcony, or that in life some of the words might be no more than mutterings.

Only when you are talking aloud when *alone* is it a monologue. Anything else is a dialogue! There are entire books of inaccurately titled "monologues" for the actor, consisting of long speeches lifted from plays in which one character talks to another. Someone can *talk back* to you with a look, a snort, a yawn, by turning away, by smiling, by giving you a concentrated look of attention, etc. When a character is called on to talk to the *audience*, it is not a *mono* but a *duologue*—the audience becomes the actor's partner. (Talking to the audience is discussed on page 207.)

As a mere beginning for the complex problem of talking to *yourself*, I would like you to start to discover and define all the things that make *you* talk aloud to yourself when you are alone, and then present it as an exercise.

Why do we talk to ourselves? *To gain control over circumstances*: To cope with the boredom of a routine or tedious task; to cope with being rattled by time or other pressures, such as frustration and emotional problems, etc. If you are late for an appointment, and are trying to get yourself together as you rush out of the house, and you hear yourself saying, "Where's my key? I've got my gloves. My briefcase is packed. Did I make that call?" etc., as you proceed with the physical tasks of leaving, the verbalization is simply an attempt at organization.

If you are making up a grocery or laundry list, you may verbalize, "Gotta remember the milk. Oh, yes—cranberry juice," etc., and it may help you to remember.

Then there is the kind of fantasy talking aloud which accompanies the boredom of a routine task and manifests itself in comments to and about yourself: "You're stupid. Why did you do it like that?" or "Good girl. You fixed those

Talking to Yourself

little eggies nicely." These kinds of comments are often accompanied by oohs and ahs, expletives and grunts. All of these examples are usual and so easy to re-create that I don't suggest you concern yourself with them for the exercise *unless* you think that you never talk to yourself. You *do*, but as it is mostly a subconscious procedure that makes you verbalize, it's possible you are not aware of it. If you think this is true of yourself, by all means start to explore these very basic ways of talking aloud when alone.

If you *know* that you talk to yourself, examine circumstances which go beyond the routine and enter another realm of fantasy. Often while bored by routine tasks, we verbalize fantasies, pretending to be a movie star, royalty, a big boss, a child. We are playing a game. (There's a marvelous example of this at the opening of Elmer Rice's *Dream Girl* when she's getting ready to go to work in the morning.) Haven't you stood at your bathroom mirror completing your toilette and chatted with yourself, switching from Cary Grant to Bette Davis, from self-criticism to self-approval, and kissed yourself in the glass with, "You gorgeous thing, you"?

From there on, the verbalizing gets dramatic! We've had a fight with an agent—or wished we had—and as we come into our apartment, slamming the door, releasing our fury by yanking off our coat, we verbally take it out on the agent. We fantasize what we *should* have said. "Don't you treat me like that, buster, I'm an artist!" We put him down by imitating him. "Really, you did that rather well, but you're not exactly what they want for the part." We reexamine what we *did* say to him. "Oh yes, sir. I understand what you mean. You know these things better than I do."

Or when we are nervous before an audition we practice how we'll impress the director. Or we already assume we've been turned down and start telling him off. "You bastard! Who do you think you are?" We have it out verbally before

THE OBJECT EXERCISES

or after a crisis with colleagues, loved ones, tradesmen, even bus drivers.

What we *don't* do is tell the whole story, or stay in sequence. We *know* what we're talking about, and there is no one there who has to be told what it's about. Consequently, we deal with what disturbs us without the outer logic necessary to make it clear, as we would if another person were listening. All good playwrights know this when they write a monologue. Let the humanness of your behavior reveal the necessary events.

Also, we do not literally, physically act out the words. Our physical life stays connected with the place in which we find ourselves alone; it does not illustrate the life about which we are verbally fantasizing. If I am tidying my desk and having a verbal battle with a friend who bested me last night in an argument in a restaurant, he sits—in my mind's eye—in the restaurant, but *not* in the chair at the other side of my desk. I may flail my papers in the air as I battle with him, but I don't *literally* flail them at the chair across from me.

When Juliet stands on her balcony and talks alone to her Romeo ("Wherefore art thou Romeo?"), he is in her mind's eye at the ball or in the street or in his room, but *not* in that star at which she's staring.

What Juliet is doing on that balcony before, during, in between, and after talking to herself brings me right to the next common mistake which is made by actors, more in actual monologues than in the exercise. The actor very often builds his monologue only around the words and forgets the essential things about his physical presence. I always say, determine what you are doing there *besides* talking to yourself. A verbal life can never have freedom or precision if the body from which the words must spring is inaccurately occupied. I strongly recommend that the scene be found physi-

Talking to Yourself

cally *before* you approach the verbal action. Something as general as "I'm in the room waiting for so and so" as an answer to "What were you doing?" has to be made specific by *what* you are *doing* while waiting. Once the physical task is determined, it's easy to contact the inner or outer objects which will propel you into verbalization. Your activities may be temporarily arrested by the verbal life, you may even be diverted from one activity and begin another one, but you do *not* come into a room in order to talk to yourself. You do *not* sit down or rise to talk to yourself. You must know the real reason you do these or other things under your given circumstances in order to allow any verbal fantasy to take shape.

A small dilemma arises for actors, just often enough to deserve clarification. Often, while talking alone, the actor discovers that he "indicates" or verbally dramatizes almost like a bad actor, while dealing with the absent person who has upset him. To a certain degree, a human being exaggerates in order to supply the absent partner; if the person in his mind's eye were really present, he would obviously speak to him quite differently. The actor is nervous about presenting this strange verbal exaggeration for fear it will be misunderstood as plain bad acting. The acting will always remain truthful if it stays within the confines and privacy of the circumstances, but it will definitely be bad acting if it is "indicated" for the audience.

The exercise as it is presented should be of value to you as a start toward many monologues in contemporary, nonpoetic plays. Conquer it before you leave this kind of reality to tackle the deeper and more difficult problems which arise in the heightened realities of poetic drama.