

## THE OBJECT EXERCISES

*(The last two exercises employ a character from a play)*

### 9. History

Identifying with and finding realities of historic time and place (the character taken out of crisis in the play)

### 10. Character Action

Objects as they affect two different characters in terms of behavior

# 11

## THE BASIC OBJECT EXERCISE

THE BASIC object exercise places no emphasis on any particular technical problem. It simply should test your ability to re-create two minutes of your life and bring it to presentation as if for the first time.

Incorporate all the questions on page 82 except perhaps the first, since I assume you *know* who you are—or think you know. First, give yourself an event or a simple task and establish your circumstances—past, present and future.

For example, you are coming home exhausted and want to make yourself comfortable. I have suggested your “home” for the place of your exercise so that you will explore all of the things in your surroundings that continuously influence you when you are alone, which, until now, you have probably taken for granted. And don’t ignore the influence of the city and neighborhood of your living quarters.

If you are uncomfortable you must ask yourself, What is uncomfortable—and why? Suppose your feet hurt. Why? You walked the “rounds” of producers’ and agents’ offices on a hot, sticky day in July. You were wearing thin-soled sandals which rubbed at the back of your heels. You were rejected by

## THE OBJECT EXERCISES

agents in a variety of ways—coolly and courteously told, “Nothing today”; rudely and humiliatingly told, “You’re too fat for the part”; offhandedly informed, “Try us again next week.” The producers were away on vacation.

You have just climbed three long flights of stairs and had trouble locating your key, and you come into your apartment to flop, only to find a disorderly apartment. Now you pursue your objective to try to get comfortable. You drop your portfolio with its photos and credits on the table. Painfully, you remove your sandals and leave them near the door. You go to the window to open it further for more air. Soot from the windowsill blows in and dirties your hands. You hobble to the sink to wash your hands, etc., etc. You end up sitting at the kitchen table soaking your feet in a bowl of warm water while you cry softly into your vodka-and-tonic, feeling sorry for yourself. You are comfortable!

OR

**TIME:** 7:10 on a beautiful spring morning in 1973.

**PLACE:** In your bed on Perry Street in New York City.

**SURROUNDINGS:** Your alarm clock is on the antique night table at the right of the bed. The window is wide open; the white Orlon curtains are blowing, and the early light is shimmering. The streets are still except for isolated foot-steps and barking—someone is walking a dog. Your chiffon robe is across the room on a stiff, white chair. One slipper is next to the bed, the other was kicked under it, etc.

**GIVEN CIRCUMSTANCES:** *Past*—You had a heavy date last night and went to a great new French movie. You had a little too much to drink and showed off. You slept heavily and got the bed clothes tangled. You slept ten minutes past the alarm.

*Present*—You are considering how to stay in bed a little longer. You see a man in an apartment across the street

## *The Basic Object Exercise*

watching you in bed. You wonder how to get to your robe and slippers.

*Future*—You have a reading for a part in a play today. You have another meeting with last night’s date later on.

**RELATIONSHIP:** To your date—possibly serious for the future; tender, humorous. To the young director of the new play you’re going to read for—he thinks you’re terrific and right for the part, but isn’t sure he can persuade the producer. You’ve worked for the director in stock and “handle” him easily. To the peeping Tom—he’s done this before, and you’ll give him his money’s worth. You love your new robe, earned from a commercial. The slippers are tacky and should be thrown away. Your date’s cigarette butts have a musty, stale smell in the ashtray on your bureau.

**MAIN OBJECTIVE:** To prepare for the reading.

**IMMEDIATE OBJECTIVES:** To get your robe and slippers on. To get a cup of coffee and some juice. To get the script ready with pencil and pad in order to study the scene you will prepare. To lay out a proper wardrobe for the audition and to make yourself elegant.

**OBSTACLES:** Time—you have only until ten o’clock before the reading. Physical—you’re slightly headachy from the extra drink. Weather— it seems too balmy and beautiful to work. The script is badly Xeroxed and difficult to decipher. The peeping Tom won’t leave his window, etc.

**ACTIONS:** You leap out of bed and flaunt your behind in your thin nightie at the peeping Tom, before yanking the curtains together and putting on your gorgeous robe. You turn the clock to the wall so that your lateness won’t rattle you. You empty your friend’s ashtray in the attempt to get him off your mind. You look for an aspirin for your headache, etc., etc.

These examples should stimulate ideas for an approach to your own basic object exercise. The order of examination of the various categories is not as important as the

fact that you eventually cover them all. You may begin with a relationship to someone and build an objective around that, which you then clothe in circumstances, or you may begin with an objective. Let me repeat that no matter how much you improvise in the course of your rehearsals, the final work entails the decisiveness of the actions which have evolved from your particularizations of all the elements I have described in such detail. I sometimes call this your final score. The final shape you give the whole, the determination of the objectives, whether they succeed or fail as they lead you on to the next one should become inevitable. And your craft will be tested by your ability to present the final shape with the spontaneity of the first time.

How much of your behavior has been subconscious and reflex will become clear to you as you put it under the microscope in this fashion. You should also discover that your actions are dependent on your wishes and the objects which surround you.

All technical variations of the ensuing exercises incorporate the elements you have examined in this one. Don't omit any of them.

# 12

## THREE ENTRANCES

HAVEN'T you stood nervously in the wings waiting to make an entrance, fighting for concentration to gain faith in your character, in your circumstances, in your very state of being, while stagehands scurried around, whispering near the light board, and other actors chatted distractingly? If you were *on* stage when the curtain went up, although some of the distractions were similar, at least you were surrounded by furniture and objects which allowed you some kind of illusion. You didn't stand frozen while waiting for the curtain, but probably connected yourself with some small doing which came from the events that would lead you forward into your activities as the curtain rose.

How to overcome the ice-cold shower-shock of the first contact with the audience as "He enters" from backstage onto the stage has been a problem for even some of the great stars I've worked with. Actors protect themselves from this shock usually in one of two ways, both incorrect. In the extreme, they either sneak on and into the stage area, floating inconspicuously without decisive action until some object engages them so that it must really be dealt with, or they