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TALK TO STUDENTS ON THE MISSION OF THE THEATRE

THE MISSION OF THE THEATRE
 CREATING ILLUSION
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THE MISSION OF THE THEATRE:

If we go on with our work without sometimes thinking of the significance, the meaning, and the ideas, my impression is that it will die out. Whether we are in business, in religion, art, or science, if we are forgetting certain "from where" and "where to," then a certain death comes upon it. Therefore, it is necessary sometimes to revive certain ideas - who are we, what is our mission, and what are our means to create certain things?

CREATING ILLUSION:

I think the theatre is such a vast theme that it can be approached from many, many angles. We are not going to embrace the whole theme, we will only touch upon it somehow. Today we shall try to look upon the art of the theatre from the point of view which is so characteristic - we can try to imagine that our whole business is actually a very strange thing...to create illusions. The more we create illusions, the more we create in ourselves the things which do not exist, the more we are on the right way. The nearer we come

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to the things which do exist around us - so-called naturalism - the less we are artists, the less meaning we have.

The illusions which we create, or should create, where do they lie? Does it mean that we have to take fantastic, imaginative fairy tale plays? I don't think so. The illusions with which the theatre is concerned can be everywhere, every moment on the stage, in all possible places. The illusions lie in the play very much but mostly in the actor's soul. If we shall start with the feeling that the actor, when he appears before the audience in a very strange building - because the theatre is a very strange building - having arisen from the Greek amphitheatre and even today in the most materialistic, naturalistic time when all our buildings are resembling match boxes, even in our materialistic time, the theatre, as a building, is a very strange thing.

If we will really try to realise that the actor is uplifted and the audience is sitting below, this simple fact that we are on different levels with the audience is something which can always be accepted as an illusion. This is the first step to this strange world in which the actor and the audience live - certain illusion is there already. One part of the people face one way, the other another - there is nothing naturalistic about this way of facing each other. Already there is a certain illusion, a certain fantasy about it. Some people, for instance, are dressed in evening

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clothes - there is a certain festive mood always there - other people are putting on costumes and make-up, and they appear absolutely as an illusion.

The spectator is not himself either. The audience sits there and then comes the moment when the building becomes dark - a charming illusion - everyone expects it and realizes that it is the beginning of the transition into another world.

This moment of expectation of the part of the audience is again a charming illusion of life. When the light dims in the theatre, we lose our everyday life, and we accept this other world. It is something which does not exist materialistically - it exists in the soul both for the audience and the actor. We plunge into the other world which is the world of souls and not of bodies, although the bodies are there. The audience lives in the soul world when the light dims and the expectation comes.

EXPECTATION AND PREPARATION:

We, as actors, must always appreciate this moment of expectation - the curtain itself is a very strange thing which we have become accustomed to but which we cannot explain. Expectation in the audience, and preparation on the stage. Then this strange thing which divides us goes up, and the full illusion takes place - the fusion between the souls of the

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actors and the audience. We forget what a marvelous thing is here - when we meet people in our everyday life, under whatever conditions, we are always somehow separated. If it is at a tea party, it is terrible smiling - tea and teeth, - but so separated. When we are in the office, we are separated. In family life, being absolutely near to each other, we are still separated because each has his own separate world going on.

THE CURTAIN AND THE AUDIENCE:

When the curtain goes up, there are no more separate barriers - the audience is not compelled to smile, they are absolutely free and by themselves. We will never find people more "Ibsenized" than at the moment when the curtain goes up. The audience is full of the most open beings at this time, and we, as actors, should meet these souls. The people in the audience are definitely children in the best sense of the word at this time. Even critics suffer sincerity sometimes, but the normal audience becomes absolutely like children.

THE ACTOR AND THE WORLD OF ILLUSION:

This is the most beneficial moment for starting to create the illusion. There are two ways - one way is when the actor discards the illusion and tries to resemble life as much as possible, as photographic as possible. That is the most killing thing for the whole world of illusion, and this

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we see everywhere in the theatre today, except where there are old traditions. The other way is to have the courage or the training to discard this photographic thing and, even if the play is a very naturalistic one, we can go along this line of illusions. Even if we do not have an illusion in the theme, or the costumes, or settings, we can still do this as actors.

Where lies this lost illusion? It lies in the actor himself, only and exclusively. Where does it lie? In his body, in his text, in his words? - no - it lies in his attitude towards theatre in general, towards the theatre as the world of illusions, and secondly in his attitude towards this particular given part.

Let us say that we have elaborated - by means of the Method - such abilities as, for instance, significance. Where does it lie? Not in the body, but it is significance which is the significance of the illusion. For instance, Mussolini is very significant, but without any illusions - the most rude significance which can exist in the world. It is a terrible significance, but without a drop of illusion. If we move the stage like Mussolini - significant but wooden - we will lose our illusionary significance. When we take a certain position with illusionary significance, we will never break this precious moment when the curtain goes up.

Let us take atmosphere. Is there anything more strange than atmosphere? What is atmosphere? No one can explain.

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It is an indescribable thing which is there and not there. Unless we create atmospheres we cannot live in the world of creative illusion.

Then we have the feeling of beauty - again an illusion, something which will answer the expectation of the audience when the curtain goes up. The audience sees significance, atmosphere, feeling of truth, beauty, ease, form, psychological gesture, and the whole audience is drawn into the world of illusion, into the world of creative illusion.

The actor, even when acting Ibsen, becomes a great magician. He creates things which are known and not known because the artistic illusion always discovers new things for everyone. Real, good, sound artistic illusion is never something which you have seen before - no matter how many times you have seen the same performance. If the actors are able to create this strange artistic illusion, you will go again and again to see the same performance, and you will never see the same illusion twice.¹ Each illusion is different because it is a little window into the other world, which is inexhaustible. Therefore, all our illusions are not only the very heart, the very science of our art, but they are the first step to the knowledge of something more than we knew before. It is always knowledge.

Take, for instance, how we are laughing at Aguecheek

[Hure]

I cannot get rid of it because it is always revealing

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something new. Each time there is something new because it is absolutely an illusion. This character, as a real person, could not live one day. There are no circumstances on the earth in which such a person as Aguecheek could live. It is a full illusion. It feeds one. Where lies the illusion? Not in how he speaks, but who he is at this moment. Is he a magician, or is he an ordinary person deprived of the world of illusion? If the latter, then he can give us nothing.

THE INNER ILLUSION - THE MIRACLE OF ART:

If the love for illusion is awakened in us, then there is nothing that we cannot do. We can move a finger so that it will create a whole world. If the actor lives in the world of illusion that he is not man, then he will really not be seen. The power of inner illusion, like magic, is a miracle. It is the miracle of art. We plunge into a different sphere, a different world, which has very little to do with the physical world. It is purely the soul world. Knowledge and experience come, and we begin to understand the world around us deeper and more profound with each year, if we love artistic illusions.

What kind of knowledge we get through these illusions is another theme. What meaning for the cultural life have these dreams which are able to live in illusion? What meaning have they for the development of humanity? Many such points can be touched upon.