

Listening, Learning and Leading in Today's World

**Lecture for the Graduation Ceremony at UPF
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Mr Chancellor, fellow academics, graduates and students of the best university in Catalonia, parents and friends,

Let me among the first to congratulate you all on your new found status and to wish you success in whatever endeavors and challenges lie ahead.

When I look at each of you, the graduates, as your name is called and as you climb the stairs and walk across the stage to be capped by the Chancellor and to be acknowledged by your peers, your professors and your family, I think of your parents and your professors who have supported you during your years of study, and the thoughts that are going through their minds - and yours - at that moment. There are those among professors who have shared with you the same experiences during your years at UPF, the difficult times in study, the times spent solving your problems and maybe the problems of the world. And wherever your careers may take you, whatever pinnacles of fame you may ascend to, it is really difficult to forget those who shared your hopes and your disappointments.

Graduation is a fantastic moment. You are entitled to be proud. You might think that it is the end of a journey, but it is actually the beginning of a new process. Most of you feel satisfied, comforted and pride of having a degree. But I remind you that the real journey begins now as you turn this degree into something which is meaningful, useful and productive for yourself and for others. You enter a world riddled by weaknesses and strengths. But you can add to these weaknesses and strengths by bringing your dreams and your ideals into it. Robert Louis Stevenson, once wrote "to be what we are and to become what we are capable of becoming, is the only end of life". That is why you came to this university. Throughout its short history this university has been committed to providing the very best in terms of teaching, research and scholarship to the local community in Barcelona, Catalonia and Spain. This University, and indeed this city, has been your home during the time that you have studied here. It is also a city I cherish and a university I am honored by. I feel deeply honored to teach at UPF. I am honored to teach at a university where professors and students are respected and whose ideals are close to my heart. I am thankful for this opportunity. I came to Barcelona to give a series of lectures at UPF because I have a passion for teaching, but also because I have a hunger to learn from other cultures. It is not the dream of a Catalan or a Spaniard, who might share the same citizenship or national identity with you, but it is the dream

of a cosmopolitan intellectual who shares the same values of individual liberty, moral integrity and human solidarity with you. Barcelona is said to be the arm and brain of Spain, while Seville is its heart. But I think we can say that Barcelona is also a humanly tempered city where there is an intellectual commitment to art and culture. Walk down the streets of Barcelona and you really do walk in the footsteps of giants like Salvador Dali, Joan Miro, Antoni Gaudi, Isaac Albeniz and many others. To the visitor who has but a few weeks at his/her disposal, Barcelona should be his/her Mecca.

This is a city where there has been a permanent process of learning through listening. I would like to use the Baudelarian concept of "*flanerie*" to describe the act of listening to a city. Baudelaire saw the *flâneur* as having a key role in understanding, participating in and portraying the city, while remaining detached. The *flâneur* is a stroller, a loiterer, someone who ambles through a city without apparent purpose but is secretly attuned to the history of the place and in covert search of aesthetic and spiritual adventure. Here we can turn to Benjamin and say that the figure of a "*flâneur*" is that of the detective, who will not let the unsuspected out of his/her sight. The *flâneur*-like walk is therefore an art of listening to the present. A "*flâneur*" walks the streets to break the pattern of the boring people rushing to and from work. A "*flâneur*" is a creator of empathy and by doing this a "*flâneur*" can change the world. Learning is a way of becoming a "*flâneur*". Learning is pushing the boundaries of mental ghettos as only a "*flâneur*" can. Being a "*flâneur*" requires a strong sense of critical thinking accompanied with a feeling of empathy and courage of autonomy. The "*flâneur*" unlike the tourist is not a mass consumer of everyday goods. The tourist has become a regulated and perpetual member of a consumer public that is configured by the activities of consumption and the priority of the object over the experience. The "*flâneur*" is the anti- consumer, a wanderer, an urban gypsy, a spectator, an unwilling participant in the structuring of space, time, money and consumption. The "*flâneur*" is at one and the same time performing many roles. The "*flâneur*" is the observing subject of Modernism and also the product of Modernity itself. As Benjamin affirms, "The *flâneur's* object of inquiry is modernity itself. Unlike the academic who reflects in his room, he walks the streets and studies the public space." He is the mobile reader of modern public life. However, the "mobilized gaze" of the "*flâneur*" is an empathic gaze, through which he enjoys the incomparable privilege of being able to seek the meaning of objects with curiosity and wonder beyond mere reality. As a matter of fact, learning is also a way of making sense of life. Learning is important, but if we can't use it to make sense of life it is of no use to us. Any genuine learning will result in knowing how to bring about a better condition of life than existed earlier. What we learn from learning is that there are no certain answers in life. Life is nothing but a series of questions. Life's most urgent question is that life is a question, and because life is a question, it is worth living. But we should never forget that life is worth living because we live with others and for others.

This is where you stand today. I realize that you will be the future leaders, animators and ground-breaking thinkers of your professions and of the communities that you will live in, whether that is in Barcelona, in Catalonia, Spain or even beyond European continent. In all cases the world needs you as you need the world. You all have different gifts and different ways of saying to the world who you are. The world needs a sense of worth, and it will achieve it only by those feeling they are worthwhile. I know that some of you are political and social sciences students, some students in economics, finance and management and others in pharmaceutical industry and biotechnology, biomedical research, clinical laboratory or comparative studies in literature, art and thought who will have different destinies. Nonetheless, I would like to remind you to remember that although you will have different paths in life, you need to be aware of your future moral and social responsibilities. One thing is for sure, you will need to be ethically grounded leaders who combine your capacities of knowledge and creativity with your moral perspectives of empathy and mutuality. This is a unique combination of epistemic capabilities and ethical inclinations that will help you to succeed in a world being shaped by the twin revolutions of reason and values. As you leave this stage today as a graduate of UPF, I hope that your future plans include an ongoing relationship with the Catalan, Spanish and European societies, but also the world, your new alma mater, your nourishing mother. No matter where you will live or what you will do or who you will become, you will always be engaged in a process of learning. Your ultimate responsibility is to create a process of learning for yourself and for others. But the only way to do this is to be able to continue to listen to different voices of the world. Let colors of different cultures penetrate your eyes and the sound of their multiple traditions ring in your ears. There is no such thing as a worthless listening, provided you know what to listen for. As the proverb goes, "Every end is a new beginning." But every new beginning depends on how we end each chapter of our life. You have ended an important chapter in your life, but another chapter starts. Life is like reading from one chapter to another, while not knowing what will happen in the next chapter.

Well, I say to all of you, **START WRITING YOUR NEW CHAPTERS, FOR IF YOU STOP WRITING YOU WILL NEVER MAKE HISTORY.**