LAUDATIO
Sponsor’s speech by Professor Manuel Castells, on the occasion of the granting of an Honorary Doctorate of the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (UOC) to Professor Alain Touraine

The Universitat Oberta de Catalunya today welcomes Alain Touraine as an Honorary Doctor and eminent member of its academic community. This is an honour for our university, because Alain Touraine is one of the greatest sociologists of the last fifty years. His work has had a decisive effect on how we think of society, politics and culture, and has furnished social science researchers around the world with innovative research hypotheses. He has trained whole generations of sociologists and intellectuals, some through his teachings, others through his writings, and all by way of example as a rigorous researcher, founding theoretician and socially-committed intellectual, based on complete independence from power structures and ideological cults.

Alain Touraine forms part of that French cultural elite made up of former students of the École Normale Supérieure de Paris. Originally a historian, he soon evolved towards sociology. Or, rather, it was sociology that evolved towards him, since he proposed from the very start the refounding of this discipline. His doctoral thesis at the Sorbonne, in 1965, presented a coherent theoretical system which redefined society’s processes and structure by means of a change of perspective that places the actor at the centre of social dynamics; hence the name Sociology of action. Whilst still very young, he was appointed Professor of the École Pratique des Hautes Études in Paris (later renamed the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales), France’s most prestigious social science research and doctoral teaching institution. He has remained in this post throughout his professional life, except for a short period as Professor and founder of the Sociology Department at the Nanterre campus of University of Paris, a brief but troubled period, as it lasted from 1966 to 1969. At the École des Hautes Études, he successively founded and directed three research centres that have transformed French sociology: the Industrial Sociology Laboratory, the Social Movements Study Centre and the Sociological Analysis and Intervention Centre. He has also taught at some of the world’s greatest universities, such as Columbia,
UCLA and Berkeley, and at leading Latin American and Québécois universities, particularly the University of Montreal, of which he is also an Honorary Doctor, since Touraine has always had a special relationship with Quebec and its nationalist aspirations. He has directed numerous seminars and given speeches around the world, in Tokyo, Peking, Seoul, Taipei, Moscow, Saint Petersburg, Prague, Budapest, the Middle East and leading European Universities, and also in North Africa. His work has been studied for thirty years throughout Latin America, where he has always been a point of reference in the face of technocratic empiricism and American functionalism. In 2006, I myself was witness at the University of Teheran to the interest aroused by Touraine’s work, the beacon of those Iranian sociologists resisting obscurantism. Wherever there are social movements that try to think about what they do, reference to Alain Touraine is obligatory.

Finally, he has frequently given talks and directed seminars here in Catalonia, a country he knows well, often better than the Catalans themselves, since he has always raised pertinent questions for the Catalan students he has had over the years.

Alain Touraine is a great theoretician. But he is also a skilled researcher, with an extraordinary career of empirical research into the sociology of work, the sociology of social movements, political sociology and cultural sociology, often from a comparative perspective. His first work, and his first book, dealt with the evolution of the work of workers at Renault factories. In this study, he directly observed the relationship between the workplace and technological evolution, between the worker and his machines.

But he also went much further: based on his observations, he proposed a typology for the modalities of the relationship between work and technology that has subsequently been used by numerous researchers. Similarly, his research into the life plans of workers coming from the French countryside, on the working practices and struggle of the Lota miners and of the Huachipato foundry workers in Chile, and the complementary doctoral thesis on the formation of workers’ consciousness, are based on research by means of questionnaires and advanced statistical analysis, in addition to an ethnographic focus in accordance with classical research procedures. Even more, to rigorously study social movements beyond the documentary and social history analysis that is habitual in this kind of research, he has invented a method,
“sociological intervention”. In a word, he has used as a basis the traditional study of focused groups, in selecting the key actors of a social movement, but has gone much further, in bringing them together in a closed space for numerous sessions and making them react to proposals made by the sociologist, to explore, directly and in person, the processes of building relationships and projects, going beyond psychology and without it becoming ideology. Using this method of sociological intervention, he has directed a wide-ranging research programme which has covered the student movement, trades union, the women’s movement, the anti-nuclear movement and, last but not least, the Occitan Movement, that has made Alain Touraine probably the only researcher to have analysed with a quasi-experimental approach the formation of the identity-based consciousness of stateless nationalism. He has also carried out in-depth studies, with a more eclectic methodology, of the May ’68 movement, the Solidarity movement in Poland, as well as the tragedy, more than “movement”, of Allende’s Chile.

Thus it is that Touraine is no social philosopher or thinker of the old French school. Above all, he is a scientist who aims to found a new science, a sociology based on observation, but one that goes beyond the data to find its sense and integrate it into a coherent theoretical whole, based on original concepts that aim to understand society by breaking it down into recordable and analysable social processes. This goes against the grain of all usual types of sociology and lies between a sociology with European (or even French or German) roots, which is an offshoot of philosophy with a propensity for ideological discourse, and a sociology with American roots which comes close to social statistics and the sophisticated calculation of the banal. Given that the relationship between theory and empirics forms the basis of any science, it is perfectly valid to consider Alain Touraine as one of the founders of scientific sociology, which is still in its infancy despite a century of existence. This is a difficult undertaking, which has caused him a deal of trouble over the course of his life, but which has been understood and followed by numerous researchers around the world. If, one day, it proves possible to create a form of sociology that stands, in its specific area, at the level of other disciplines that are today fully accepted, such as economics (with all the associated caveats duly noted), it will be in good measure due to the pioneering efforts of Alain Touraine.
Alain Touraine is also a socially-committed intellectual, and always has been. For a university such as the UOC, which places ethics alongside science, and sees no contradiction in doing so, this is also an important criterion in granting the greatest honour that we award from our modest arsenal. He supported the Algerian resistance in the sixties in France. He understood the desire for change of the students of May 1968 in an archaic France (and this had a serious negative impact on his academic career). He lived intensely in Chile, alongside his wife Adriana, whose untimely death broke our hero’s heart. More particularly, he lived through Allende’s Chile and wrote a diary which is an indispensable tool for understanding one of the great dramas to have marked our lives. He followed the beginnings of Solidarity in situ and closely participated in the political transformations of Eastern Europe. He became close to the Québécois movement, whilst constantly warning of the dangers of taking an ultra-nationalist ideological posture. And he was, of course, at the vanguard of French democratic solidarity against Franco’s dictatorship, generously helping numerous students exiled from Spain and Catalonia. In fact, he fought against all dictatorships, especially in Latin America, creating friendships based on this solidarity with intellectuals and political leaders from across the continent, especially with Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Ricardo Lagos. His efforts were, however, focused on helping prisoners and exiles. He saved lives and helped rebuild many more. His solidarity was pragmatic: it was aimed at saving people before lost causes. And, naturally, he was a close observer of French, Italian, and Spanish politics, generally from a critical and tormented perspective, with a clear awareness of the limits of politics and a profound rejection of manipulative ideology. However, he has never abandoned his independence, nor has he allowed his critical voice to be silenced. He has never belonged to any political party, despite the fact that many politicians have sought to add him to their ranks of supporters. Nevertheless, he has remained true to his principles, which are rooted in his theory. The relationship between social movements and state politics is a dance of death. The domesticated intellectual becomes a servant of bureaucracies. At the same time, guided by his clear vision that politicians are needed to administer society, he has approached and offered counsel to anyone willing to listen to him. A considerable number of world leaders have called for him and listened to him. Few of them have made any
real use of his wisdom, because politicians only follow that advice which confirms what they have already decided on the basis of their own interests. And Alain Touraine has kept himself outside the power structure, providing lucid testimony of his times, with no true audience other than the myriad of social actors who still believe that another world is possible.

However, if Alain Touraine has a place in history, it is because of his work.

And there is a considerable amount of it: 42 books translated into numerous languages, dozens of scholarly articles and hundreds of articles of analysis and opinion. Perhaps his key book is that which has reached the limits of theoretical radicalism: *Production de la société* ['The Self-Production of Society'], Seuil, 1973 and 1993. More than five-hundred pages of pure theory, original, coherent and structured, without a single bibliographic reference, because Touraine did not wish to hide his own theoretical construction behind the formality of a litany of references whose only purpose is that of submitting to academic formalities. However, it is this book that contains the core of his scientific project, subsequently developed in numerous research works and analytical essays. The question to which Touraine seeks to respond is that which is raised by any social science: where does society come from? What is the process of creation of a society’s values, norms and institutions? Because the majority of social analyses, including those of the economy, presuppose the existence of society’s values and norms and place the observation of social conduct and relations within this framework. Thus, the school is studied as a source of inequality and labour relations as determined by the logic of capitalist profit and resistance to the laws of the market in the name of workers’ needs. However, how are the social relations that create a specific school, a certain mode of production, a nation state, a knowledge economy or a family as an expression of patriarchal society created? A classical response would be to resort to history to explain the origin of societies. However, from a scientific point of view, the present cannot be explain by resorting to the past. What is it that explains the past? Evolution has its laws, both in society and biology, and it is these laws, and their variations, that are the object of study in sociology, or whatever the name is that one wishes to give to this scientific discipline. It
could have been dubbed causal history, but, in fact, this is not what the practice of historians shows us, except for ideological constructs disguised as laws of history, as is the case with liberal or Marxist ideologies of the progress of humanity guided by reason or the forces of production. Recent neuroscience research has highlighted Descartes’ fundamental error by demonstrating through experiments the role of biologically-conditioned emotions in the production of feelings and the latter in the shaping of rational knowledge. Also, the processes involved in forming the founding values of any society’s institutions are the result of conflictive relationships between actors, defined by the place they occupy in a given social structure, but capable of exiting their structural determination to reinvent their lives, and hence society, on the basis of their own plans. This is the nucleus of Touraine’s theory: society is produced by the Subject, i.e. by the social actors, individual or collective, who, in practice, and based on their consciousness, make life plans and attempt to build forms of social, cultural and political organisation that they call society. Naturally, social practices are so diverse that we come across a multiplicity of social forms, cultures and institutions: however, all of them are the result of a combination of specific elements that can be identified on the basis of a conceptual system and whose interrelations can be established by means of methodical observation. Hence the centrality of social movements in the theory of the self-production of society. The Subject is a concept that materialises in the observation of social movements. Social movements are not organisations or mobilisations, even if they find support in these forms of expression. Social movements are practices that transform the values upon which society is based. They are not revolutionary movements, although they have revolutionary potential. Revolutions, however, are political actions, whose goal is state power. Social movements are located at a deeper level of social reality. They aim to change our way of thinking and, in doing so, end up transforming our institutions: I think differently, and so I’ll attempt to live differently and will fight to do so. Identification of practices leading to a social movement cannot be decided upon in advance by a researcher’s ideology or preferences, but has to be determined by the results of the research. It is in ascertaining which practices form the basis of new relationships which involve profound changes in social institutions that the actors in social transformation are identified.
The most illustrative case of this analysis methodology is that of feminism, the subject of Alain Touraine’s latest book (*Le monde des femmes*, Fayard, 2006), because the deep-seated transformation of women’s consciousness over the last three decades is clearly demonstrable, as is the resulting crisis in patriarchal society, at all institutional levels, from the family to the state, with extraordinary consequences for the socialisation of children and, therefore, for the formation of the personality. Touraine shows how women’s consciousness encourages the emergence of new values, which tend to make universal feminine specifics and, consequently, to dissolve domination mechanisms at the deepest levels of social practices. It is clear that the shaping of feminism stems from structural changes in production and work and that it is rooted in the women’s movement for equal rights between the sexes. However, it is on the basis of the development of a new common life plan, on the basis of their struggle, that women’s practice goes beyond equality of opportunity within a given social organisation to the founding of a different society based on the values of affirming the sense in living above and beyond the accumulation of consumer goods. In doing so, the women’s plan transforms society as a whole:

> “Le renversement qui fait passer d’une société de conquérants du monde à une société de construction du soi a remplacé la société des hommes par une société des femmes. […] Aujourd’hui les femmes ont plus de capacité que les hommes pour se comporter en sujets. À la fois parce qu’elles portent l’idéal historique qu’est la recomposition du monde et le dépassement des dualismes anciens et parce qu’elles prennent plus directement en charge leurs corps, leur rôle de créatrices de vie, leur sexualité.” (p. 224)

Thus, far from being a romantic form of sociology following the dreams of magnificent losers, the sociology of Alain Touraine, based around the Subject, in fact takes the first steps towards social genetics, an analysis of the genesis of the society from which the values that organise the world of signs (studied by semiotics), the world of institutions (studied by political science and macroeconomics) and the world of behaviour (studied by microeconomics and microsociology) all arise.
The difficulty of enterprise explains why this work remains unfinished. It will, however, be continued, and perhaps one day finished, not by my generation, but by the generation of sociologists that will be created by the generation that we have created. Because sociology is the most complex science in terms of its object, the most vulnerable to ideology and the manipulations of the power structure, but, at the same time, nothing stops us from extending scientific method to include research on ourselves.

In fact, Alain Touraine and his disciples have already made significant advances in the practice of research inspired by this theoretical model. Touraine has built a theoretical machine for analysing social movements which is inspired by dialectics. For him, a social movement is defined by the relationship between three elements: the identity of the movement (its self-definition), the designation of its adversary or principle of opposition, and the movement’s principle of totality, in other words the movement’s goal with regard to the organisation of society. In combining the relationships between these three elements and in varying the predominance of one over the others in accordance with the observation of practices carried out by research, an accurate analysis is achieved of the relationship between the differential structuring of each movement, the normative orientations of their actions, and the impact of the movement on society’s values and institutions.

Despite the abstract nature of these formulations, Touraine has managed to carry out fairly accurate analyses of social transformation, with significant consequences for our understanding of the key processes that configure our world. Thus, in his analyses of Latin America, a privileged object of his observation, he has explained the complexity of the processes of social and political struggle on the basis of the variation between and articulation of three principles of totality that define the movements: development, nationalism and democracy (Actores sociales y sistemas políticos en América Latina ['Social Actors and Political Systems in Latin America'], Santiago, Prealc, 1987). The majority of Latin American movements have tried to articulate a national consciousness and the construction of democracy with development goals that are, both economic (growth) and social (redistribution of resources, the fight against poverty). It is the extent of a
movement’s ability to articulate the three goals that determines its social impact and future. However, this articulation requires the construction of compatible principles of identity (for example, populism articulates development and nation but leaves democracy to one side; neoliberalism separates development from the nation by inserting it into globalisation) and, therefore, the ability to correctly identify adversaries and social bases of support. This explains the great influence of Alain Touraine’ theory in Latin America.

Touraine has also used his powerful analytical abilities to take a penetrating look at this world’s crises in a series of essays which aims to increase awareness of the depth of our problems. Thus it is that, in 1997, well before the explosion of cultural conflicts caused by the clash between globality and identity across the planet, he published a remarkable book, Pourrons-nous vivre ensemble ? Égaux et différents [‘Can we live together? Equal and different’], Fayard, 1997, which states:

“Les informations, comme les capitaux et les marchandises, traversent les frontières. Ce qui était distant se rapproche et le passé devient présent. Le développement n’est plus la série des étapes à travers lesquelles une société sort du sous-développement, et la modernité ne succède plus à la tradition : tout se mélange ; l’espace et le temps sont comprimés. […] Ne vivons-nous pas dans une société mondialisée, globalisée, qui envahit de toutes parts la vie privée et publique du plus grand nombre ? La réponse à la question posée : pouvons-nous vivre ensemble ? paraît donc appeler une réponse simple et formulée au présent : Nous vivons déjà ensemble. […] Est-ce assez pour dire que nous appartenons à la même société ou à la même culture ? Certainement pas. […] Au lieu que nos petites sociétés se fondent peu à peu dans une vaste société mondiale, nous voyons se défaire devant nos yeux les ensembles à la fois politiques et territoriaux, sociaux et culturels que nous appelions sociétés, des civilisations ou simplement des pays. […] Des ruines des sociétés modernes et de leurs institutions, sortent d’un côté des réseaux globaux de production, de consommation et de communication et, de l’autre, d’un retour à la communauté.” (pp. 13-14).
However, the gulf between instrumentality and identity destroys the institutional bases of society. Thus, Touraine suggests a hypothesis for exiting the dead end with the observation:

“Nous ne pouvons vivre ensemble, c’est-à-dire combiner l’unité d’une société avec la diversité des personnalités et des cultures qu’en plaçant l’idée du Sujet personnel au centre de notre réflexion et de notre action.” (p. 30).

But what exactly is this “Subject” that is able to rebuild society’s unity within this diversity of cultures? Touraine provides his response at the end of his work:

“Les principaux acteurs politiques de notre futur proche ne seront ni le citoyen, comme dans notre première modernité, ni le travailleur, comme dans la société industrielle ; ils seront, ils sont déjà présents partout où des individus ou des groupes travaillent à combiner une expérience culturelle privée avec la participation à l’univers de l’action instrumentale. Ce ne sont pas les catégories les plus objectivement définies qui seront, comme ce fut le cas dans le passé, des acteurs historiques ; ce sont les catégories les plus directement définies par la nécessité ou la volonté de rendre compatibles les deux univers que la démodernisation sépare. C’est pourquoi la jeunesse, les femmes, les immigrés, les membres de minorités et les défenseurs de l’environnement sont, déjà depuis vingt ans au moins, les acteurs historiques les plus manifestes, au moins dans les sociétés industrialisées ; ce sont eux qui s’efforcent le plus consciemment d’agir et d’être reconnus comme des Sujets” (p. 359).

This is how Touraine’s theory ends up diagnosing the crisis of coexistence that afflicts our world, divided between war and terror, between the imposition of a sole rationalism and a fundamentalist extremism, and identifies some social actors who could become the source for the rebuilding of society.

Nevertheless, the recognition of the work and figure of Alain Touraine by the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya is not merely a generic homage to his scientific contribution and his intellectual
mastery. It is to be found in a specific viewpoint with regard to Alain Touraine’s ideas, because the UOC has its own personality: it defines itself as a Catalan university and, at the same time, a universal one, that aims to create innovation in the university world based on the new conditions of the information society. It wishes to be a Subject. In doing so, we connect with two of Alain Touraine’s key contributions. Firstly, with the theoretical one that he was the first to formulate, at the same time as Daniel Bell: the existence of a new type of society, the post-industrial one. In fact, even though Bell and Touraine were working simultaneously on the same subject towards the end of the sixties, Touraine’s book *La société post-industrielle* was published in 1969 (Denoël), that is, four years before Bell’s *The coming of the post-industrial society*. In his book, Touraine identified the process of transition from an industrial society towards a new social structure that he later defined more precisely as a “programmed society”, in which the production and conflictive appropriation of knowledge became the organising principle of power, wealth and influence in society. This is a theory that finds a direct echo in a university that has dubbed its doctorate programme the “Interdisciplinary Doctorate on the Information Society and the Knowledge Economy”. What is more, in Touraine’s analysis, the university becomes a key institution in the new society. For this reason, a great number of his works have been dedicated to studying the university (and, in particular, universities in the US) and he has strived throughout his life to make European Universities shed the corporate archaism that has prevented them from really assuming the role that the theory of the programmed society has assigned to them. Well, cher Monsieur Touraine, here you have a university, the UOC, that aims to place itself at the heart of the process of informational transformation and that attempts to innovate in its teaching methods (based on the internet), in its management model (a private university that is public in scope), and in its research orientation: scientifically analysing from an interdisciplinary perspective this, our information society, of which you have sketched one of the first maps for its exploration.

On behalf of our university community, which is pleased to receive you, our heartfelt thanks for having done what you have done and for being who you are.

Barcelona, 19 June 2007
GRACIAS A LA VIDA

Lyrics and music: Violeta Parra

Gracias a la vida, que me ha dado tanto.  
Me dio dos luceros, que cuando los abro,  
perfecto distingo lo negro del blanco,  
y en el alto cielo su fondo estrellado,  
y en las multitudes el hombre que yo amo.

Gracias a la vida, que me ha dado tanto.  
Me ha dado el oído que, en todo su ancho,  
graba noche y día grillos y canarios,  
martillos, turbinas, ladridos, chubascos,  
y la voz tan tierna de mi bien amado.

Gracias a la vida, que me ha dado tanto.  
Me ha dado el sonido y el abecedario.  
Con él las palabras que pienso y declaro,  
“madre”, “amigo”, “hermano” y luz alumbrando  
la ruta del alma del que estoy amando.

Gracias a la vida, que me ha dado tanto.  
Me ha dado la marcha de mis pies cansados.  
Con ellos anduve ciudades y charcos,  
playas y desiertos, montañas y llanos,  
y la casa tuya, tu calle y tu patio.

Gracias a la vida que me ha dado tanto.  
Me dio el corazón, que agita su marco.  
Cuando miro el fruto del cerebro humano.  
Cuando miro el bueno tan lejos del malo.  
Cuando miro el fondo de tus ojos claros.

Gracias a la vida que me ha dado tanto.  
Me ha dado la risa y me ha dado el llanto.  
Así yo distingo dicha de quebranto,  
los dos materiales que forman mi canto  
y el canto de ustedes que es el mismo canto.  
Y el canto de todos que es mi propio canto.
Gracias a la vida que me ha dado tanto.

Piano: Carmen Paz
Voice: Gabriela Ahumada