

In order to live, we need air, food, but, at the same time we need impressions\*

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Mrs. Rector,

Mrs. President of the Senate, Members of the Senate,

Members of the academic community, distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

I am honored to receive today the title that you offer me. Although over 20 years have passed since I have been sharing my artistic career with my job as a professor and director of the „Oscar Hammerstein” Centre at the Columbia University in New York, I must admit that I have often the feeling of being rather in the position of a student, who is still willing to study, than in the position of a professor who knows and must teach something to others. The awarding of this highly important title takes me to the suspicion that you have seen however in my activity the proof of a certain authority figure, to which you have decided to offer a prestigious recognition, that provokes me. I feel overwhelmed and, at the same time, I am curious to see how my vainglory will handle this when challenged, especially because this robe tends to get dangerously on the vanity’s high horse.

**To be in the service of an energy source which is unknown to us**

All of my life I have enjoyed traveling. I can say, like Brook, that traveling is, actually, my first profession. When I was young, living in the communist Romania, the most accessible road was within the boundaries of imagination and that is why I chose the theater, where I had the possibility of traveling without a passport, crossing over mental and emotional geographical areas, without constraints, looking for an authority figure to be my guide. Thus, I started building up a basis, the foundation of a possible subsequent evolution. I

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feel privileged because I have the chance of working in two different areas which agree perfectly – the theater and the opera, on one hand, and school; on the other hand, - they are the ones who should be celebrated today. I am very fond of the idea of school, in the sense of the old tradition, whose aim was the delivering of deep knowledge with the help of experience. School without a life, an experience, would have seemed nonsense, a waste of time. A long time ago, the role of a school was to take care of the harmonious education of the student, training him to be a better person, happily combining different characteristics of the individual. The theater came with the same idea, resorting also to experience. Above any theory, what really mattered was the outcome of the process, the face - to - face communication, the impressions, the feelings, the thoughts that we all have. The Greek amphitheatre was reverberating by the echo of the reunited expression of the word, sound and music. I now imagine the old actors, the old great actors, being in the service of an energy source, which is unknown to us, that was revealed during the performance, when the human body was directing a message to the cosmos. The relation was never domestic, but universe-conscious, – the ancient actor acting outdoor, with the sky and the stars serving as scenery, taking part, not just witnessing, the cosmic drama. An actor should therefore look for that vertical connection in one's personal life as well, for the balance inside, the wish to be in life also an Actor with a capital A. "All the world a stage and all the men and women merely actors"-- Shakespeare reminds us of our obligations.

### **The theater: it should teach us how to live**

Comparing it to other things, I often wonder whether what we westerners call theater is still worthy of bearing this name. I think we have forgotten that theater can help us as individuals and society, for a better understanding of our humanity and why we so often lack it. The stage – either it's at the theater or at the opera – it's not an end in itself. It is a part of our life, it should teach us how to live. That's how it was 2000 years ago. But nowadays all sorts of harmful elements have come across, such as commercial, economical and political pressure on art, the vulgar and coarse temptation for shallow entertainment, which places human need on a very low position. Perhaps on the mediocre, confuse and agitated days of our lives the theater mirrors in a sad and poor way a society heading towards its doom. Therefore, now more than ever theatre and school should remind us of the aspirations which have led us towards the art, intending to seek the key that will pave the way to another vision,

not only to the horizontal, but towards the vertical, where natural contacts are possible, free of clichés, in order to regain purity, to free ourselves from the prejudices gathered in time.

Konstantin Stanislavski used to say that every five years, at any age, we should stop and come back to school. And he was heard by the actors of the Theater of Art, even by the older and well-known ones, who, temporarily stopped acting and secluded themselves in Stanislavski's studio, to refresh and harmonize their instrument: body, voice and emotion. This was in 1920. Nowadays, 100 years later, this exigency is forgotten or put on the black list. We want just to live comfortably, effortless, lazy and passive, only we dream to be- like Andy Warhol said - "famous for 15 minutes".

### **Don't forget to give your horse oats**

Peter Brook has told us while working with him, an anecdote about a peasant, whom, after getting drunk on Sunday, on Monday he had forgotten to give his horse oats. Yet the animal has worked profitably all day long. On Tuesday – the peasant wonders greedily – what will happen if I forget to feed him also today? The horse carried on with his duty and worked properly, even when hungry. On Wednesday and Thursday the sly peasant thought that he would save some money if he didn't give the horse oats, without figuring out that the poor animal just wanted to prove his master how useful and submissive it is, hoping that it would be appreciated and it would receive some proper food. But instead of treating him well and assuming that work can be done really well even without food, he never thought at feeding him on Friday. The experiment seemed to have been very successful. On Saturday, the horse dropped dead. The example of the anecdote concerns us all.

### **The flower of the youth**

Zeami, in his book about the hidden tradition of the Japanese Nô theater, speaks about the living flower and describes how to constantly stick to the search of quality, how to take care of developing your potential talent, so that the freshness of the flower won't wither. In this book, written 700 years ago, which I consider to be the most important book about theater that has ever been written, in it are described the steps which an actor must follow during his life, so that he won't lose this flower of youth. A child has a natural grace. He doesn't have to make any efforts in order to preserve it. But to prevent it from disappearing after a certain age, he must follow a challenging and effortful evolution, because it is so easy to lose the flower if one doesn't look after it, it withers lacking of oxygen. This is the trick.

Because we take the flower, the talent, for granted, as if we deserve it and we don't have to pay any price in sacrifice and effort to attain it.

### **The osmosis between the body and the essence**

The title of Stanislavski's book – *The work of the actor with himself* – clearly explains what this is really about. Only that few people do anything else but read the title. Only the ones who are really making progress by constantly working with themselves, have the opportunity to keep the flower of youth untouched, like Grotowsky said “only when the osmosis between the body and the essence occurs. When you are young, being organic is crucial. But staying at the level of the body forces you to disintegrate along with the body, to die with it.” So, you have to find something else in order to keep the flower of youth always fresh. That is why you feel the urge to periodically come back to school, to study again, to start again, to forget all that you once knew, all that what you don't need anymore.

### **To teach the others what neither do I know**

When Columbia University offered me the chair of the head manager of its School of Theater, I had never dreamt of being a professor. On the contrary, the idea of teaching others what I myself don't know, seems to me even today baffling, especially in what our profession is concerned, so difficult to define, where every method is valid as long as it leads to a discovery and dies as soon as the discovery has been made. How can I teach a subject, called “life”, without fully grasping its meaning? It's like promising a diploma with the title of “The Mystery of the Life”. If the theater is also a mystery, as well as life is, how can it be researched? How can one investigate a mystery? The one who is supposed to help the student is himself in the dark, in search of the unknown; he has also doubts when faced with a large amount of resources, which permanently change their limits and consistence. Therefore, the one who is to be trained first is the teacher himself.

### **“To live in the moment”**

In theater, every moment is *now*. Neither *it was*, nor *it will be*. If the theater isn't gone, every moment is lived. It's all about the present. If we have already passed on to another scene, the one that was before it seems to have gone like it has never existed. But if with the help of the rehearsals we could remember that particular moment, we would relive that scene and become aware of what is happening. A conscious rehearsal is like reliving a

glimpse of eternity. Like they use to say, “to live in the moment”. That particular moment is part of the ordinary life with everything that surrounds it: thoughts, emotions, words, deeds, sensations; but they are relived, rejoiced, just like others had done it thousands of years before us: the eternal moment, captured in a photo, a frozen motion. That is why we keep saying that at school, just like in the case of the theater, what feeds us is the memory inside of us, not the information gathered in the drawers of our mind, but the actual experience.

### **Every time I find an answer, a new question shows up**

You acquire knowledge with the help of experience; you live with the help of life, while the unchecked information vanishes from our memory. The capacity of raising questions is very active in the childhood, but it will soon be repressed and even cut out because we feel the social need to provide ourselves with answers. At school and at the theater is where the questions are encouraged, but, unfortunately, a good many times circumstances force us just to find answers. Personally, each time I find an answer, a new question arises. When a première occurs, either at the theater or at the opera, although people use to cheer and the critics are enthusiastic, something remains unfinished, undone. Personally, I often have the impression that I haven't said all what was possible to say and I wonder myself if I understood all the way. The questions are the ones, which helped me make progress. And it's so wonderful when we discover that life forces us to remain modest and open when faced with the great questions: “Why are we here?”, “Where do we come from?”, “Where are we heading to?”. We are all curious to find out, for example, when someone from our family or a friend dies, where his spirit went. Or, when a child is being born, we ask ourselves where he comes from: “Where was he before having been born?” “What's the point of this quick bustle?”. When confronted with this short passing, to avoid being caught in bitterness or cynicism, when the answer is not obvious and you have to wait for it, in order to keep the flower alive, - in theater, at least -. We must stay open and curious when we encounter an experience, which tends to point to a different life, an echo of another presence, of another reality.

### **We need a different kind of food**

Beyond the turbulent façade, full of confusion, of vagueness, from which we apparently understand nothing, there is something else. Like Mircea Eliade magnificently described the origins of the Paleolithic culture: “It's hard to imagine ourselves how would our

mind function without being convinced that there is something, a real irreducible in the world and it is impossible for us to think how would the conscience look like if the impulses and the human experiences wouldn't have a meaning, a sense. The conscience of a real world is closely bound to the revelation of the sacred." Briefly, the sacred is an element, which is strongly connected with the conscience; we can find it inside of us all, inside of each of us. Love and hate, apprehension, joy and despair, the famous topics of birth and death; of the mystery of the conscience – eternal topics, ancient topics – they can't be solved. They are mysterious, but in a good way; when touched by the vibration of the music, they give birth to a positive energy, an energy that stimulates life, something that is not solved, which doesn't draw a conclusion, but it encourages us to keep looking for it.

At least on stage, this is the big chance. The much more difficult and unpredictable search of the unseen... we can work to become more sensitive (able to useful, to serve...to go beyond the subjective, the personal concern)

Seeing is a positive, even if we see things we think of as negative, every impression is always a positive. Chance and food. In order to live, we need air, food, but, at the same time we need impressions, as Gurdjieff often said, we need another kind of food.

Thank you.