



Alberto Capatti
Lectio Magistralis

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Dear Students,
Dear Colleagues, Teaching Staff,
Rector
Petrini,
And All Guests,

This speech is being delivered by a professor who has been retired for more than a decade. I am free to express judgment, dream up projects, and be critical of my past and present role. However, I am not critical of the university with which I am in dialogue today or of the students upon whom our future, and yours, depends.

I will start with the Gastronomic Sciences created in Pollenzo in 2004 as part of an agriculture degree class. This later evolved into a food technologies course, which subsequently led to the establishment of a gastronomy science, culture, and politics degree class in 2017.

This study was born in Pollenzo, among farms, gardens, wineries, a castle, and a new hotel. It has a second location in Colorno and was quickly imitated by Parma and then Padova. It has now spread to 17 Italian universities and a few foreign ones. This is a story that deserves to be told, as it values witness and planning.

Its origin is unique, with Petrini at the center, surrounded by Montanari, a medieval food historian, Riva, a food technologist, and myself, an associate professor of French language and literature and a historian of contemporary food. I was also the director of Slow Magazine. In the beginning, we discussed how to teach food and nutrition and hypothesized about creating a cultural and educational center, a college or academy, and, perhaps, as a pipe dream, a university. The possibility of making it a bachelor's degree came thanks to the consent of Petrini and the then Minister of Education, Research, and University Lewtizia Moratti. Within the Agriculture degree class, we established, not without difficulty, a new course of study. In this course, we had the opportunity to include various subjects, such as the history of ancient and modern-contemporary food, philosophy, and sociology, alongside subjects of the so-called hard sciences and economics. Thus, the Gastronomic Sciences were born. Disciplines that had never met in one sense and disciplines that needed to be invented in the other, with professors, experts, and even practitioners in marketing and other sectors linked to agro-food. This was our first identity, with a Francophile rector who would become a tenured professor in French language and literature in Pollenzo without teaching French.

The history of this university, set to be written and published, involves a projective vision of a culture reborn in 2004. It's constantly evolving in an area profoundly transformed today by climate change and communication, by the conflict between vegan and carnivorous cultures, which were not in conflict back then. The excellent novelty for students and teachers was trips where all the disciplinary heritage acquired became an object of thought and criticism, and they are an essential part of this story. Among these, I recall a memorable bicycle journey in which teachers and students cycled from the sources to the mouth of the Po, with targeted gastronomic stops and related classes.



Universities then ignored Gastronomy, and therefore, was a revolution from which new operators in the vast food field, kitchens, craftsmanship, and industry would have been born.

Are there no more stages, no other formulations in this journey? The story of Pollenzo should include an analysis of the network of Italian and foreign gastronomic science degrees and end with a project for a new degree course. An obstacle? University hierarchies and competitions that immobilize every cultural structure, while great freedom of thought is needed. Pollenzo should be the center of the future and, therefore, a constantly active laboratory.

To do this, a critical spirit that operates on the very notion of gastronomy is necessary.

Let's return to Brillat-Savarin and the very purpose of gastronomy, "whose aim is to ensure the preservation of men through the best possible nourishment." We know from experience that everything today is turned upside down. This is evident when we observe those who buy discounted goods at the supermarket, those who equate high price with quality, and those who replicate their purchases without variation. Not to mention, finally, the famished in our cities or others, who are fed by canteens of charitable associations, religious organizations, and international bodies.

We can and must overturn the very definition of gastronomy as "reasoned knowledge" of nutrients in a society where the reasonableness and unreasonableness of knowledge are controlled from above by supermarkets, advertising promotions, and Artificial Intelligence. It is difficult to escape these guiding forces, and the preparation of food in the kitchen is an additional label individually assigned to the dish prepared by those who nourish themselves. There are obviously scientific paths and universities that educate. However, even the historian of cuisine who studies Renaissance banquets, present only from an intellectual viewpoint and forbidden from tasting, is present-absent from a gastronomical perspective.

We must, therefore, assign to gastronomy a role that is not that of reasoned or reasonable knowledge but of critique of the food system, whatever it may be, starting from the present and returning to it. Critique today means self-critique, a word not found in Brillat-Savarin, and that will constitute our cognitive principle.

Gastronomic sciences operate concurrently within the same university, each instructing individually, often disregarded by others. The gap between a historian and an anthropologist may be modest, yet it becomes insurmountable between an anthropologist and a chemist. There isn't a priority or overarching teaching but rather a constant and distant comparison between different disciplines from a didactic perspective. A further step would involve a disciplinary self-analysis aimed at overturning the very notion of gastronomic sciences, making gastronomy a point of cognitive divergence. Is this a philosophical objective? No, it's the daily reality of students who make this divergence their cognitive consensus. After their studies, they will operate beyond interdisciplinarity in an operational reality just as contradictory, which will again dictate its rules in conflict with others. Self-critique must be the interdisciplinary cognitive principle, providing everyone with a perspective of themselves and others from a nutritional viewpoint. New gastronomy is born, and the sciences must continuously identify an individual and joint didactic project that constitutes the critical point of each, insurmountable unless ignored. As a food historian, I disregard chemistry and, wanting to operate didactically in tune, I overlook its existence in my teaching, adopting a pseudosymbiosis in the student curriculum. How can we resolve this contradiction if not by formulating a new project that will no longer be called gastronomic sciences but gastro critique, gastronomic critique?

Suppressing some critical words from the food lexicon seems necessary today. On any package in a supermarket, I find terms like bio, sustainable, natural, or even worse, Italian printed on a meat package to certify its origin and insidiously suggest the opposite. We live and eat in a world of symbolic



certifications that should satisfy us with quality yet are pure illusions. To criticize the abuse of the adjective 'natural' means to suppress it or to redefine it scientifically, and this happens in a society that struggles to define and specify its own food values. A nature cultivated with machines and laboratories, monitored by computers in its very life, is no longer extended nature but its artificial reproduction. We must, therefore, reformulate our entire food system with a critical vision that erases its currently advertised values. This implies that the very teaching of gastronomy starts from a self-critique that highlights a cultural waste of terms and images.

The second step will be to reclaim the politics inherent in the naming of the degree class, absent in Pollenzo, whose undergraduate degree is in Gastronomic Sciences and Cultures. Today, food policies are omnipresent, and gastronomy itself was created by an administrator and a politician, Brillat-Savarin, a prominent figure in the history of France from the revolution to the post-Napoleonic era. He began his "Physiologie du goût" with a comprehensive axiom from a disciplinary standpoint: "The universe is nothing but life, and everything that lives feeds itself." This initial statement was followed by an analysis of our diet, using various methods, without overlooking taxation. Hence, politics is a historical approach to nutrition and should not be forgotten. It is the first step of a fundamental self-critical review, in the case of Pollenzo, where an analysis of other universities can be beneficial. Today, designing means changing university teaching, which is rigidly structured, with full professors, associate professors, and researchers. It involves introducing points for reflection and experiences from practitioners and, above all, critical comparisons between different disciplines to change their structure with new goals. One must also envision the existence of a comprehensive reflection center, faculty, and students capable of formulating a project where gastronomy, science, culture, and politics have a new role beyond a single university. Restructuring, writing, and teaching by making students the primary action nucleus, who will translate this policy into their future professions. Support can come from Slow Food, a critical analyst of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which does not adequately address the urgent problems related to climate change, and from a network of professional competencies capable of liberating gastronomy from the self-referential hierarchies of academia.

Politics is climate, sustainability, and economy; it regulates the life of the farmer and our own vision of nature and, as such, must be studied and promoted in times more challenging than ever to interpret. The tractors on European roads and highways are proof of this, and a battle is underway that will be politically addressed. Let us then re-examine gastronomy and science, culture, and politics; we also add other tools to restudy our own diet, reactivating all visions without setting aside those outdated ones.

A fundamental step will be the comparison between 17 different approaches to gastronomic sciences to make an overall assessment of their success, open the examination to other countries, and hypothesize new disciplinary structures and a new outcome of training. It is desirable not only for a meeting or a congress but for the creation of an Italian gastronomic teaching agency capable of creating a didactic heritage beyond university variations. All this is not only the task of professors because the students are fundamental witnesses and practitioners, the students who have completed their educational journey and operate in the very diverse areas of food, and those who are currently in undergraduate or master's programs.

From this comprehensive examination, a new educational project must arise, a new degree class, or a degree without any class at all, with only master's programs, able to nourish everyone — professors, students, and graduates active in diverse new roles. The return of these graduates to a constant dialogue with Pollenzo would be an innovation capable of stimulating new critical reflections on our teaching. Included in this community, of course, I count the retired individuals, like myself, for over a decade, who not only possess memory but also have the desire to see their past constantly renewed, feeling like neither grandparents nor parents but like their own fathers and children.

To summarize, here are four themes for reflection and action:

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- The history of the University of Gastronomic Sciences in Pollenzo needs to be written and published.
- As politics has a vital role in gastronomic sciences, it's necessary to adapt this university's identity to the name of the degree class with new teachings.
- We need to promote a comparison and a conference with the 17 gastronomic sciences — cultural and political — currently existing in Italian universities and abroad.
- We should study a new degree program that addresses the current and future vision of the food system.

However, I want to conclude, not with these four points, but with an invitation.

Teaching about food is teaching about eating, which implies that I have to teach by eating. A conference held at the end of September 2023 on truffles took place without a single truffle being present, and countless lessons on vegetables on cooking are without a leaf, without a plate of pasta to bite, taste, or swallow. That's precisely what happens. Nutrition, on the other hand, should play its role not only with the mouth open to speak or the mouth closed to be silent but with eating — which is both practice and instruction, divided and shared, expressed from the lips and the mouth. That's how you learn, and memory will indeed serve it better later, repeating and analyzing every future bite. The opposition between those who study and those who eat insults gastronomic sciences by turning them into a philosophical theory solely valuable for thought. Eating is learning, and the teacher must participate instructively, savoring, chewing, commenting, and learning from the students themselves. It's easy to find theoretical insights about knowledge in texts and recipe books. However, suppose it's not materialized or experienced. In that case, you're lost in vocal bites that are assimilated by the ears and the brain only, with the result that no concrete comparison is realized, and you get lost in a ritual.