



*Pollenzo October 15, 2021*

## **“How Ideas Come”**

*Keynote speech by Renzo Piano on the occasion of the inauguration of the 2021-22 academic year at the University of Gastronomic Sciences in Pollenzo.*

Thank you, I am really moved to be here, because it is a marvelous sight: I would like to talk about something important, about how ideas come to us. We need to ask ourselves a question: when was the moment when you had your first idea?

There is a first time for everything, as you know: the first time you pedaled a bicycle, your first love.

But there is also the first idea. The important thing is to remember it I remember it: I must have been 10 years old, maybe a little older, and I was making a mess in my room, my first little model.

My brother was watching and told me it was beautiful.

It was an important moment: it is that moment in which, for a young person, the world opens up. When you understand it, it sets everything into motion.

But if there is no one who tells you “well done,” you cannot understand it. And this is how you enter the world, gaining the courage to say your own idea. You must dare to say it. And so begins that interminable game of ping-pong that is life. And this starts with school.

It is important that you are here. A good school is one where you play ping-pong, where ideas are sent back and forth to each other.

It is not easy: at its first appearance, an idea is nothing. The first idea, whether it is about cooking, politics, or construction, is nothing at first glance.

Indeed, people often have a bit of distrust in their idea, they hold back out of modesty.

While arrogant people are not wary.

It is important to have courage. And also accept and acknowledge that I might say something stupid, but it must be said.

At first glance, you do not know that it is an idea. It is a glimmer.

And this is not a real keynote speech, rather a talk about how to do things in everyday life.

You recognize good ideas only later, after they come back to you.

It's not easy when you get an idea, because it doesn't even look like yours.



And, effectively, it's not: I exist as the sum of all the people I've met, the things I've seen and learned. That is how we exist.

We are all "thieves" of ideas: steal them, as long as they are given back, ideally having added something.

Don't be afraid to have ideas.

There is a poet, the writer Jorge Luis Borges, who wrote a very beautiful thing: he said that every creative act is forever suspended between memory and oblivion. That which we remember, that which we have in mind, or that which we have seen somewhere.

And so you invent things, you add to them. This is very important.

At first glance the idea seems to you the idea of another, but then you add your own. And don't be afraid to steal.

I have spent my life stealing, and I have tried to give back.

This is how you live, and it requires a bit of courage.

To have ideas, you have to decide: I want to have ideas, I want to be what I want to be. It is important, and it is not that simple, because it is necessary to question yourself every time, even to take a beating.

Is it even possible to live without ideas? No. Don't even think about it for a moment.

To go forward into the future, you need to have them. Because the past is reassuring, but it is into the future that we need to go.

And you have to go there with your ideas, certainly not with ours.

This is what you need for freedom, freedom of thought.

That is why you need to have ideas. Have the courage to make mistakes.

Why are the two professions similar, mine as an architect and yours as a gastronomist?

This is the University of Gastronomic Sciences. Not of art, but of science.

And I like to call it the science of gastronomy.

There is magic in both of our crafts: in building buildings and public places and in food professions. These are professions in which you need to have ideas.

Therefore, science, but also art.

And therefore we must invest in conscientiousness: there is a way to do things, but at the same time there are ethics.

This world does not work, it needs to be changed. Half of the world is sick because they eat too much, the other half because they don't eat enough.

Let's think about what an architect does: he builds places where people are together and learn to be together.

In the world, everything, from buildings to the pan over the fire, is driven by ethics.



The world must be changed. Get that into your head. And if you are here, you already have this idea, that with this profession you can change the world.

So it's not just "how to do things," but why to do them.

A third thing - that we do not speak about out of modesty - is beauty.

A word that we don't use because it seems like a frivolous idea. And so, we do not speak of it. But this is wrong, because it is a fundamental concept. A beautiful person is not only beautiful to look at: this is a profound concept that we hold deeply. Call it poetry, call it beauty... It is part of our work and it applies to the visible world, but also to ideas, to science, to solidarity. There is the beauty of solidarity.

Even in our Italian language, which is so beautiful, beauty is not only visual beauty: it comes from the concept of "Kalos" from the Greeks, beautiful and good together.

So let's reclaim this word.

There is a beauty in gastronomy that has to do with something unspeakable: it is not easy to achieve.

Beauty is the bird of paradise, it is unattainable, it is our Atlantis. There is beauty and gastronomy, there's technique, there's science. It cannot be explained.

But you know what I am talking about. You have understood it.

Dostoevsky wrote about beauty: Prince Myškin says that beauty will save the world. And in Russian the idea is of profound beauty.

I don't understand Russian, but I know that this is the case.

This beauty, which also encompasses ethics, will save the world.

And it will save it one person at a time.