



# Fake!

Richard J. Boland Jr<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Case Western Reserve University, OH, U.S.A.

**Correspondence:**

**Richard J. Boland, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, OH 44106-7235, U.S.A.**  
E-mail: Boland@Case.edu

*European Journal of Information Systems* (2005) **14**, 446–447.

doi:10.1057/palgrave.ejis.3000581

One of my most memorable experiences with Claudio occurred in Cleveland about 10 years ago. I was serving as department chair, and had organized a semester long research seminar, bringing one great scholar in for a full week, every week of the term. During their week in residence, the visitors would give two seminars and meet informally with faculty and students, with lots of opportunity for random discussions. Claudio was one of the great scholars that we brought in for that seminar series, and it was a wonderful week of inventive thinking and challenging discussions with him. One afternoon, we slipped away from the school and went for a tour of the Cleveland Art Museum, which is one of the better American art museums. We strolled and talked, stopped for coffee, and continued exploring, and at one point, we turned around a corner and there, on our right was a large Caravaggio. Claudio spun as we rounded the corner, staring straight at the magnificent painting and shouted, 'fake'!

He was so convincing that my first thought was 'how did the museum get fooled that way?' Now, looking back on it and recalling the good laugh we had, it seems to be a perfect example of the qualities that enabled him to achieve so much as a scholar. He was bold, original, challenging and convincing.

Claudio's work with strategy was the area in which he most influenced my own thinking. Until I read his case studies, the strategy field had seemed pretty uninteresting to me. Others who had struggled with expressing the ideas of opportunism and emergence had left me with a dry taste in my mouth. It was a lot of stiff talk about being fluid, and it wasn't motivating, interesting or believable. Claudio's work on improvisation and strategy, growing out of his field research, was such an exciting new view that he changed my mind about the field, and showed me how it could be truly exciting and important. Meaningful research has to move us in our heart and our imagination, not just in the calculative, logical recesses of our minds. Claudio's case studies showed me how research can be lyrical and evocative. He showed me that our expression of ideas is as important as the kernels of truth that might be within them. His language was always surprising in a way that delighted the imagination and opened new possibilities of meaning for me. Reading him was enjoyable, but seeing him in action, making presentations or engaging in dialogue, was the most memorable way to experience his power to evoke new thoughts in us.

Two things stand out in my mind when I think of Claudio Ciborra. The first thing is the sound of his laughter and the infectious feeling of joy in word play that I experienced being with him. The laughter would start out slowly and then grow in back and forth banter. In later meetings, just a word would recall the episode and start us laughing again. Laughter is important for such inflated beings as professors. I remember Claudio visiting at the University of Cambridge while I was on sabbatical there. He had bought a copy of a cartoon book of Heidegger's ideas at the Heffers on Trinity Street and was waving it around as he laughed about what studying Heidegger had become. He didn't quote it in his seminar, but he could have without missing a beat. I always looked forward to seeing him and knew it would be a time of big ideas, and even bigger laughter.

The second thing that stands out in my memory is the sight of Claudio presenting an idea that captured what we were all struggling to say, just before we could say it. It seemed like he was always just one step ahead. Once he introduced an idea, it stayed with you, lodged in your brain along with the image of his performance. Formative context was the first such idea, a long time ago at an IFIP 8.2 meeting, I think. Bricolage is another, along with baroque, and I'm sure each of us

has our own favorites. Claudio worked at ideas with a sense of flair. He knew how much we need a better vocabulary for doing our scholarly work, and did more than his share to create one for us. We professors are like hunters after a prize. Our discourse takes us out into a field in which we search for the elusive ideas that can bring a feeling of progress. Claudio always was at the edge of that progress and I was happy to follow where it led.

## About the author

**Richard Boland** has been a Professor of Information Systems at Case Western Reserve University since 1989. Before that, he was a Professor of Accountancy at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He has been a visiting Professor at UCLA, and at the Gothenburg School of Economics. He also holds an appointment as a Senior Research Associate at the Judge Business School at the University of Cambridge. Professor Boland's research

emphasizes interpretive studies of how individuals experience the design, and use of information systems in organizations. Some representative publications include 'Perspective making and perspective taking in communities of knowing', *Organization Science* (1995), 'Knowledge representation and knowledge transfer', *Academy of Management Journal*, (2001), and *Managing as Designing*, (Stanford University Press, 2004).