A brief glimpse of Claudio

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Meeting Claudio Ciborra was an inevitable highlight for anyone joining the Information Systems (IS) department at LSE. The tall, stalwart figure, robust and well trained, as I soon realised at the school gym, which he frequented, the only senior member of staff to do so. The distinctive and pensive face, which after a visit in Milan I classified as typical of the region. The acid sense of humour, with a touch of cynicism, projected by means of a relatively high-pitch, penetrating voice with Italian melody and diction.

One moment engaged in a vivid conversation, the next mentally detached and physically enclosed in his office, Claudio oozed an aura of genuine intellectuality in an academic environment all too often absorbed in 'strategic intellectualism', often approaching knowledge and research with the intention of making profit. No doubt one would consider contradictory a life spent studying technology, information systems and organisations, as well as acting as a consultant for large companies, with more than a keen interest in the German language and Greek etymology, the writings of Heidegger and of St. Paul, or a passion for music; those were, however, the most distinctive traits of Claudio's personality: the marriage of the down-to-earth with the abstract and the intangible, the verification and negation of numerous stereotypes.

Naturally cosmopolitan in outlook and having encountered different cultures and attitudes through his various trips, Claudio maintained what I perceived as the simplest of lifestyles: plain, anti-consumerist, very private and discreet together with elements of harmless Italian exuberance, another stereotype both preserved and overturned.

The contradictory tendencies in his character, or rather the attempt to reconcile and exonerate these tendencies, were evident during conversations with him. In a particular meeting that I remember he communicated his disappointment at the elasticity of the Department's Ph.D. programme and its upgrade procedures, and admonished that the strict rules and regulations of U.S. academic journals should be respected, being entirely serious and formal. A moment later, he switched to a discussion on music, claiming that improvisation was not an element unique to jazz, but could also be encountered in much contemporary music like, for instance, that of Stockhausen. Eventually, he started speaking about a Cherokee artist and of how his apparently insignificant art had become a kind of cult symbol for his fans, describing in hilarious detail how on one occasion his followers presented the artist with stones and how he broke those into pieces with a sledgehammer in order to create 'art' on the spot.

The capacity for opening avenues out of labyrinths and for doing so in a humorous way, the intellectuality of the mind and the spirituality of the facial expression, the engagement with the real and the dissociation from the worldly and the mundane, the plain lifestyle, these were the ingredients that composed Claudio's lasting image in my mind, when his string of time was cut in February 2005. Whether at some level beyond comprehension that same temporal point was for him also the *kairos* in Aristotle's or Heidegger's sense – one of the concepts he was obsessed with – there is no way to know. However, borrowing from the Greek author Nikos Kazantzakis, I would say that we still retain our capacity to gather

our tools – vision, hearing, taste, smell, mind – and use them to keep his memory intact. Fortunately, Claudio has

left behind a plethora of stimuli for those familiar, interested, or attached to work with.

About the author

Dimitris Boucas is a Ph.D. student in the Department of Information Systems at LSE, working on a thesis on the Greek information society and the role of the state. He has a B.Sc. in Computer Science from the University of Patras (Greece) and an M.Sc. in Advanced Information Technology from Imperial College, London. He also holds an M.Sc. in Science and Technology Policy from the Science Policy Research Unit, University of Sussex, as well as a B.Sc. in Social Sciences from the Open University. His research interests are in the social and political aspects of the information society, as well as the place of the nation-state under conditions of globalisation.