

Personal note by Marco Bettoni

Dear sponsors & organisers of the Ernst-von-Glaserfeld-Archive, dear guests of this Inauguration, I would like first of all to thank Theo Hug and Joseph Mitterer for inviting me, it is a great honour for me to be here, at the University of Innsbruck, and I hope to be able to return very soon and often in the future.

In my personal note I would like to focus on three aspects of my relationship with Ernst von Glaserfeld: Ceccato, bilingualism and respect.

Meeting Ernst von Glaserfeld had a considerable impact on my life. Although we were very different people, we soon noticed that we had some things in common and so we automatically became very close over time.

1. Silvio Ceccato

My collaboration and friendship with Ernst von Glaserfeld began almost 30 years ago and we were brought together by a very special and rather unique overlap in our thoughts and feelings: we both admired the works of Silvio Ceccato – ‘a technician among philosophers’ as Ceccato liked to describe himself. Although his pioneering analyses of mental operations were largely dismissed and discounted by other researchers, Ernst and I both considered Ceccato to be one of our most important masters. We had both studied his difficult writings in depth and we shared a profound fascination with his cybernetic theory of knowledge. As Ernst wrote in Ceccato’s obituary, we were by no means troubled by the “*fundamental incompatibility of his epistemological position with the dogma of knowledge as a representation of reality*” – on the contrary in fact!

We worshipped Ceccato, but not blindly; instead we adopted a somewhat critical approach to his writings, for example, we acknowledged the weaknesses in his uncompromising criticism of conventional approaches and we both shared a preference for a more diplomatic and reserved way of spreading revolutionary ideas, such as the ‘*metodologia operativa*’ and the act of facilitating, promoting and even instigating discussion on these subjects.

2. Languages and bilingualism

As a small child, I also grew up bilingual like Ernst – he grew up speaking German and English and for me it was Italian and German. This common trait had a subtle yet substantial impact on the background to our relationship over the years. During his childhood, he learned Italian as a third language whereas I, during my childhood, started to learn French at boarding school at the same age (it was, by the way, in Milan, at the start of the 60s, when Ernst was also living in Milan and was leading his own research group there). And at the age when Ernst was learning French at boarding school in Switzerland, I was learning English – also at boarding school.

So, whenever we met alone, a strange thing would always happen: one of us would ask 'What language should we speak in?' We would look at each other slightly baffled and give it some thought until finally one of us would make a suggestion; it was not unusual for us to speak about Ceccato and Vico in Italian, about Kant in German, about Maturana in English and about Piaget in French. It was a great pleasure for me to be able to discuss the works of these and other important authors with Ernst in their own languages – laborious perhaps but useful nonetheless!

3. Recognition and reserve

My name is not widely known in the academic world and any searches for me on Wikipedia will be in vain... but for me, there have been two very big successes in my scientific career: the recognition and respect I received first from Silvio Ceccato and later from Ernst von Glasersfeld (1). In the case of Ernst, this recognition and respect manifested itself indirectly in the form of numerous recommendations which led to me being invited to contribute to various seminars, conferences and publications. Ernst never spoke to me about these recommendations directly and even though I started to suspect a connection after some time, I never dared to ask him directly whether he really did recommend me.

But that was also an aspect of our relationship: a certain degree of shyness and reserve which for me was also a mark of respect: I felt that asking him directly would be somewhat disrespectful, to Ernst in particular.

I always found him to be a noble person and he became a significant role model to me over time. And so we became closer over the years – like 'old' friends or a master and his pupil; perhaps even like father and son at times and yet we always maintained a degree of distance.

I have gleaned and learnt a great deal from Ernst and I am determined to give something back to him in the future through my commitment to radical constructivism.

(now shifting from the Rational to the Mystical)

Ernst, I would like to thank you from the very bottom of my heart for all the great things you have brought to my life!

(1) "*The respect of those you respect is worth more than the applause of the multitude.*"
-- Arnold Glasow (1905-1998, American humorist)