

EDUARDO ARCHETTI (1943–2005)



A PERSONAL MEMOIR

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Nobody who has attended any of the biannual EASA (European Association of Social Anthropologists) meetings could possibly have failed to notice the powerful presence of an energetic, playful man at the centre of every social event. Handsome like a film star, with a huge laughter and a mischievous twinkle, Eduardo Archetti could sometimes seem slightly misplaced at solemn academic gatherings, but he always revealed himself to be as professionally competent and intellectually alert as he was funny. Over the years, I have noticed that whenever Eduardo's name has come up in conversations with foreign colleagues, a smile has always appeared on their faces, faintly reflecting their fond memories of an encounter with him. Such was Eduardo's effect on others. It was impossible not to love him.

On 6 June 2005, Eduardo passed away. He had been ill with cancer for some time, but everybody hoped and believed that he would recover. His energy and

joie-de-vivre were so immense that it seemed impossible that he could die. Yet this is what we now have to reconcile ourselves with. Never again will Eduardo's acute remarks and jokes, his personal warmth and intellectual shrewdness enliven his surroundings.

Eduardo's premature death represents a devastating loss to his family and friends, to the EASA, which he did so much to build up, to Norwegian anthropology and the Oslo department, where he was the most important personality for more than two decades; and Norway has become a colder and less interesting place without him in it. He was the life and soul of the party.

Eduardo was born in Santiago del Estero, Argentina during the Second World War. (As an adult, he spoke four languages fluently, all of them in a distinctly Santiagueño way.) Coming from a cultured middle-class family, he pursued studies at the University of Buenos Aires before deciding to take a doctorate in Paris, where he would work with Maurice Godelier. Eduardo's doctoral thesis was a study of transformations in Argentine agriculture, and it was influenced by both major currents in Marxist anthropology – political economy and structural Marxism.

Before completing his doctorate, Eduardo met the Norwegian anthropologist Kristi Anne Stølen, who became his lifelong companion, his intellectual collaborator, and the mother of his two children. The couple decided to settle in Norway in 1976, and Eduardo rapidly became a central actor in Norwegian development research, Latin American studies and social anthropology. His easygoing manner could be deceptive, for he was extremely disciplined and had strong leadership qualities which revealed themselves in the Norwegian Association of Anthropologists, where he served as chairman for a period, at the Department of Social Anthropology in Oslo, where he was head of department twice, in the EASA, and elsewhere. He enjoyed his wine, his football and the other good things in life, but he also worked hard. When I arrived at work in the morning, Eduardo was usually there already, ready for a five-minute break and a chat.

As a scholar in anthropology, Eduardo will be best remembered for his writings and lectures on masculinity, sport and Argentine identities, but his interests were wide-ranging, almost limitless.

A quality Eduardo shared with one of his intellectual heroes, namely Marcel Mauss, was his generous interest in, and engagement with, the work of others. For many years, he was both my most devastating critic and my strongest supporter, and I know that others felt the same way. For Eduardo was a sharer, not a keeper. His contagious laughter, his acute insights, his unselfish attitude to knowledge and his astonishing breadth of reading were like a magic powder which invigorated the Department of Social Anthropology in Oslo and made it a truly exciting place to be for his colleagues and generations of students.

Adapting to Norwegian society and culture was never easy for Eduardo. In spite of his professional success – he soon became a highly respected and beloved professor of anthropology, and an occasional media commentator on Latin American issues and football – and his easy, humorous relationship with all kinds of people, he always felt an alien in Norway. Most of the time, he compensated by making jokes at our expense, thereby making Norwegians laugh at themselves; but he also did some serious analytical work while trying to make sense of his adopted country, where the dominant temperament and values were so different from Latin America. Eduardo appreciated many aspects of Scandinavian society; the gender equality, the relative lack of corruption, the general decency – but he also bemoaned the hypocrisy and sheepishness of the public sphere, the stubbornly parochial nationalism, the moral supremacism, the bad food and – not least – the (locally) overrated football.

Eduardo's funeral service, a secular ritual, was given on 14 June in Oslo. The church was packed with colleagues and friends, relatives and students; hundreds of people who each had their own indelible memories of Eduardo. Melancholic music from Argentina was interspersed with a small handful of speeches. Perhaps the most moving speech was given by Eduardo's brother-

in-law, Kristi Anne Stølen's brother. Relating how his sister brought this foreign man home in the 1970s, he painted a fascinating picture of the relationship between Eduardo and his in-laws as it unfolded at Misund, a remote hamlet on the west coast of Norway. This sophisticated, well dressed man with his urbane manners, foreign newspapers and many books was utterly out of place in Misund, yet he took a vivid interest in «women's affairs», notably cooking, and he would soon bring herbs and salad ingredients with him on his visits with Kristi Anne. Concluding his speech, unable to keep the tears back, Eduardo's brother-in-law said, «He was a comrade, a mate.»

In the days and weeks following Eduardo's death, we received many letters of condolence from colleagues abroad. All of them were unique, personal testimonies to the great man. His colleagues from Argentina described him as their guardian angel, reminding us of his crucial role in reconstructing Argentine anthropology after the fall of the Junta. Others told personal anecdotes, tiny fragments for the mosaic. One said that Eduardo shone like the sun. I think that sentence made us cry more bitterly than any of the others, because it was so beautiful and so true. We are slowly beginning to realise that Eduardo is not coming back, but we will forever remain grateful for everything he gave us. Like Maradona, he was a divinely gifted centre-forward, but with the additional qualities of the midfield strategist.