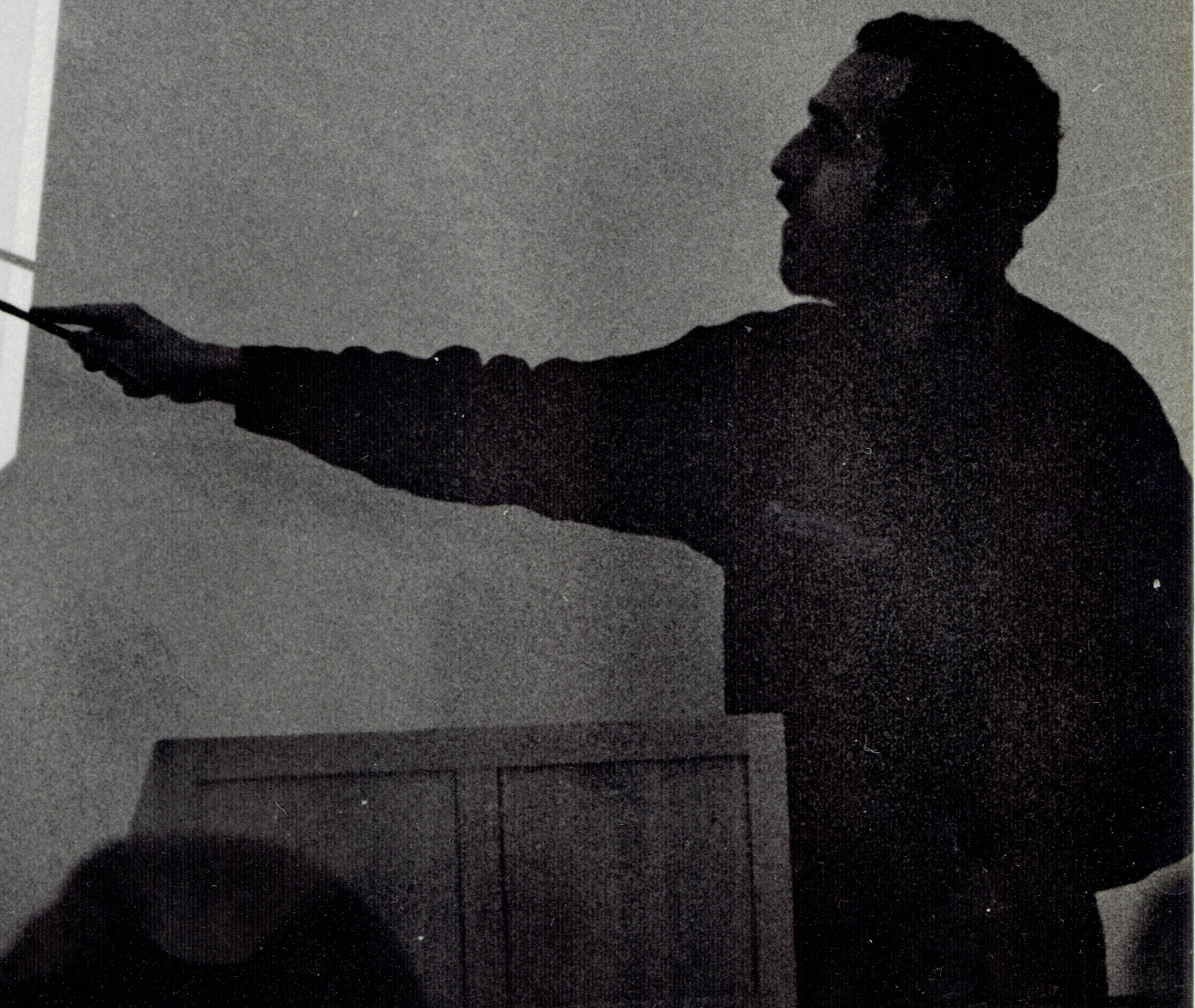
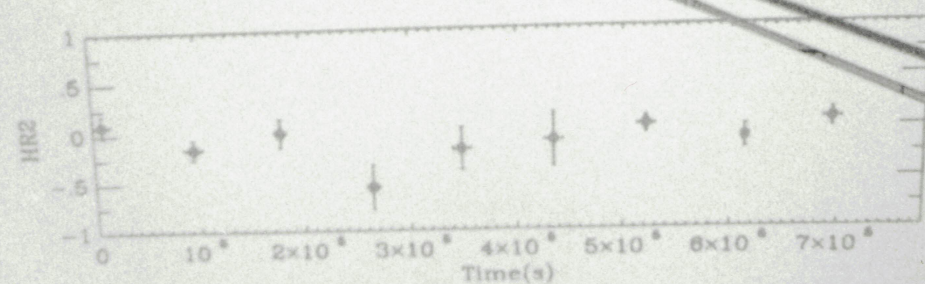
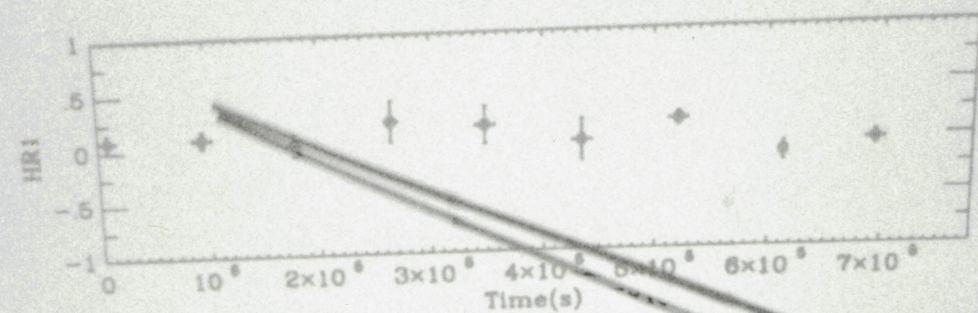
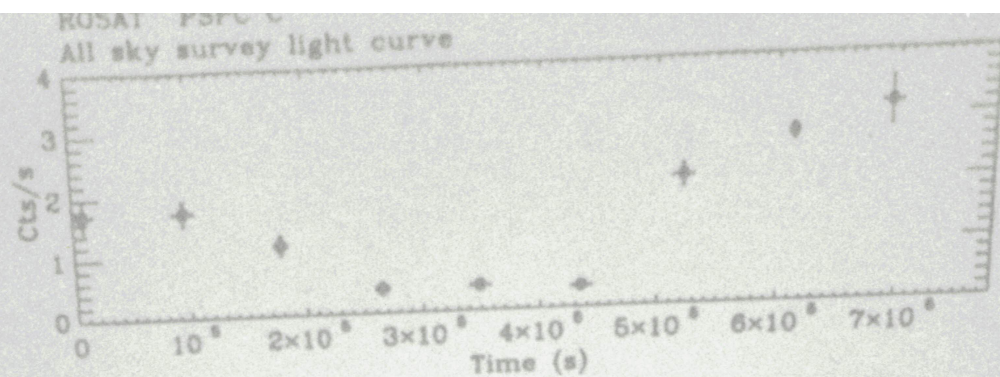


ROSAT years at the C3 container

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1989-1994
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*The many tones of accretion to the memory of Tomaso Belloni
Cefalù - September 8, 2026*



Silvano joined Tomaso in November 1989, just a few days after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

It was a very different time from today. A time of enormous change: the end of the Cold War, and a time of great hopes. And yet, even then, there were things that worried us.

Tomaso often said that the process that led to a single German state in 1990 was not, as almost everyone described it, a process of reunification, but rather one of annexation.

The institutions of West Germany were simply being extended to the former GDR. The Federal Republic was enlarged to include the new eastern Länder. Dissidents who, until just the day before, had been celebrated and supported were quickly pushed aside, while others who had been well integrated into the GDR system saw the change of regime as an opportunity for personal advancement.

This memory illustrates very well one of the qualities that distinguished Tomaso, and one that had a profound influence on me: **his critical mind, his determination, and his ability to look beyond appearances.** Tomaso applied that attitude to every aspect of life—to almost everything around him.



He had an extraordinary range of passions. Football—not only watching it, but playing it. Music—not only listening to it, but making it. Photography, cinema, literature, science—and not just his own field.

Tomaso had a wonderful sense of humor, which, combined with his very quick mind, could sometimes produce explosive results.

Once we were at Ringberg Castle in the Bavarian Alps, which the Max Planck Society uses as a conference center. Tomaso noticed that there were telephones everywhere. There was even one inside the lift.

So what did he do?

He waited for someone to get into the lift—and then called them.

When the unsuspecting victim picked up the phone, Tomaso said:

“Hello, this is the freezer. May I speak to the lift?”

We laughed about that for weeks.

He also had a real passion for satire. When he read the comic strips by Disegni & Caviglia, you could hear his laughter echoing through the corridors of MPE.

Together with our friend and colleague Carlo Izzo, he also tried his own hand at satire, often with hilarious results. Their favorite targets were colleagues, politicians, and acquaintances.





Tomaso was not always an easy person.

When he was in a bad mood, he was really bad. On those occasions, the wisest thing was simply to keep your distance. Anyone trying to cheer him up did so at their own risk.

I remember one occasion when a mutual friend approached him at precisely the wrong moment. Tomaso looked at him and said:

“Comastri: this is not the day, not the month, not the year!”

There is an English expression that suited Tomaso remarkably well:

He did not suffer fools gladly.

I remember that when Tomaso was working at MPE, he contributed to the development of the ROSAT data-analysis system. His relationship with his boss was, to put it mildly, less than idyllic.

With the frankness that was so characteristic of him, Tomaso would openly express his doubts and criticisms during group meetings. His boss—whom we shall simply call *Zeta*—eventually became so wary of him that he began meeting members of the group individually, rather than risk facing questions and criticism in a meeting he might not be able to answer.

I first met Tomaso on March 30, 1992, when I arrived at the Max Planck Institute in Garching, just a few days after completing my PhD thesis.

I remember being welcomed by the director at the time, Professor Joachim Trümper, who described the many different areas of research being pursued at the institute, thanks to observations from ROSAT, the X-ray astronomy satellite launched in 1990.

It was a tremendously exciting time—or, as Tomaso liked to say, quoting *Mediterraneo*, which had just won the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film, “**a time of great ferment.**”

The Max Planck Institute was at the very heart of the high-energy astrophysics community in those days, attracting a constant stream of visiting scientists and colleagues from around the world. There was so little office space that containers had to be installed and converted into offices. One of them was known as “**the Italian container**”, and that was where I was given a desk.

That very afternoon, I met, among others, Tomaso, Silvano, and Carlo.

I also distinctly remember that, at the end of the day, I saw Tomaso at the bus stop, completely absorbed in reading *Cuore*, a satirical weekly magazine that was very popular in Italy at the time. He totally ignored me, even though we had only just been introduced.

At that very moment, Silvano drove past in his bright green Fiat Uno. He and Tomaso exchanged some rather irreverent gestures and burst out laughing.

Once we were on the bus, Tomaso immediately buried himself in *Cuore* again, chuckling to himself and continuing to ignore the world around him.

I remember thinking that I was probably not going to become friends with colleagues like these—and with Tomaso in particular. I went back to my hotel feeling rather discouraged.

Fortunately, events were to prove that first impressions are not always the ones that matter. That day marked the beginning of a genuine and lasting friendship.

At that time, being Tomaso's friend required a certain ability to adapt to his mood changes. He could move from great enthusiasm—sharing a new scientific result, or quoting passages from books by Daniel Pennac or Stefano Benni—to inexplicable silences, cutting replies and long faces, without giving you the slightest clue as to why.

Tomaso was not always easy to love—but it was worth it!

Mood swings aside, what he gave me—as a scientist, as a colleague, as a family man, and ultimately as a friend—is something I consider priceless.

I learned an enormous amount from him because Tomaso was a man of extraordinary culture and remarkably wide-ranging interests, which he shared with both passion and deep knowledge.

Tomaso talked a lot. Once he started, he was almost unstoppable. He always had something interesting to tell you—and I was always willing to listen.

I think that may have been the secret of our long friendship.

He was equally attentive to what I told him, although he would almost never react immediately—or even soon afterward. Instead, he showed me how much he valued our friendship in other ways: rarely explicit ones, but gestures that, over the years, I learned to recognize and appreciate.

For example, before saying goodbye, he would often quote a line from some famous film:

“Remember, let's keep in touch.”

And we did.



We kept in touch for thirty years, largely thanks to him: thanks to the importance he placed on our traditional meetings over the Christmas holidays, and to his determination to create other opportunities for us to meet.

He was always extremely affectionate toward my daughters, whom he had come to know before his own children, Alice and Alessandro, were born.

I never really had the opportunity to spend much time with Tomaso and his children together. But having seen how he was with my daughters, I have no doubt he was an exceptional father—and one **they can be proud of.**

Tomaso's Wedding Party (2002)

