

Migrations and Boundary Work: Harvard, Radical Economists, and the Committee on Political Discrimination

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Argument

In the late 1960s, in the midst of campus unrest, a group of young economists calling themselves “radicals” challenged the boundaries of economics. In the radicals’ cultural cartography, economic science and politics were represented as overlapping. These claims were scandalous because they were voiced from Harvard University, drawing on its authority. With radicals’ claims the subject of increasing media attention, the economics mainstream sought to reassert the longstanding cultural map of economic science, where objectivity and advocacy were distinguishable. The resolution of the contest of credibility came with a string of cases of dismissals and denial of tenure for radicals. The American Economic Association’s investigations of these cases, imposing the conventional cultural map, concluded that personnel decisions had not been politically motivated. Radicals were forced to migrate from the elite institutions from which they had emerged to less prestigious ones. “Place” became a marker of their marginalization within the profession.

1. Introduction: Boundaries and migrations in economics

The cultural history of science can be written as a succession of contests over boundaries and domains.¹ Our understanding of boundary work has advanced greatly in recent years. Thomas Gieryn (1995; 1999) has proposed a taxonomy for these practices. Emanuel Graziano (1996) has shown boundary work to be a “generative and creative activity” in addition to a contest. Others have directed our attention to cartographic legacy, as enduring cultural attributions get reproduced in controversies (Kinchy and Kleinman 2003).² My contribution to this developing literature is to consider the interface between contested cultural topography and place. The emphasis will be on

¹ I reference “boundary work” in the sense that Thomas Gieryn has used it. The notion of already constituted social worlds and boundary objects as argued by Susan L. Star and James R. Griesemer (1989) seems less relevant for the materials I am researching.

² In cultural studies there is a vast literature on symbolic boundaries. It has become so ubiquitous that it evades a neat definition, see Lamont and Molnar 2002 for a comprehensive review.

place as a marker of authority within a scientific field, as distinct from place as a fact or truth maker (Shapin 1988; Gieryn 2006). Further, I will argue that the resolution of boundary disputes not only resets cultural attributions but also prompts migrations in geographical space.

I have elected to study a controversy in social science, namely economics. In the context of the wave of protests that hit American campuses in 1967–1972,³ a group of young economists labeling themselves “radical political economists” rehearsed a set of scandalous indictments on the economics profession. They forced the question of where to locate politics: Was economics political? And should economics be political? Eminently, these were questions over the boundaries of the discipline.

As I will show, one of the principal sites for the design of a radical program in economics was Harvard University. In section two I will argue that propelled by faculty disputes and their siding with protesting students, a group of junior faculty took a stance of antagonism towards the mainstream in economics. In section three, I will survey the published record to reveal radicals’ redrawing the boundaries of economics. In collectively taught undergraduate courses, writing textbooks, and meeting in conferences, the group converged to a shared understanding of the cultural landscape. They argued that the economist should not seek distance from politics. Instead, she should become an advocate for social revolution. For the radicals any desire to remain neutral in the context of social unrest was to perpetuate the status quo and to become an ideologue for the establishment. In section four, I argue that conventional economists were slow to respond, and most simply ignored the radicals’ criticism. Those that felt engaged by the criticism responded harshly to the blurring of old time boundaries, and called for economics to preserve immunity from political and subjective passion. The context and timing of the conventional economists’ response suggests that they were most worried by the public echoes of radicals’ indictments.

To observe the resolution of this controversy, as is so often the case in contests of credibility, I look at patterns of hiring and firing of radical economists. Cases of alleged denial of tenure and dismissal of radical economists were widely publicized in the press in the mid-1970s. The concern was such that the American Economic Association formed a Committee on Political Discrimination to investigate some of the alleged foul-play. I report and discuss the conclusions of the committee. My story concludes with the marginalization of radical economists. Partly by design, to pursue their advocacy, partly persecuted by their opponents, radicals abandoned elite universities for less prestigious institutions. One finds a notable interlocking between cultural space and geography. The fluidity in cultural attributions and boundary work occurs against a resilient map of authority. The authority of place plays a non-negligible role in contests of credibility.

³ For the sixties there are many detailed histories, I have found that Isserman and Kazin 2004 and Morgan 1991 provide competent overviews. For the seventies Schulman 2001 is worthy of note.

2. Harvard as place for radical critique

In September 1968 at the Ann Arbor campus of the University of Michigan, the Union for Radical Political Economics (URPE) was founded by a dozen graduate students (Lee 2004a). URPE's original prospectus of 1968 was critical of the economics profession. It called for directing economics into what radicals termed "politically relevant" research. Their adopted approach was to rewrite the questions of economists. They inquired: "How frequent are articles which deal with the economics of racism, poverty in the American economy, international imperialism, or the real economics of defense?" Interestingly, radicals endorsed the standard tools of the profession (URPE Secretariat 1969, 173). The prospectus outlined a minimum of shared ground and reflected the absence of prior debate between radicals over the content of their economics. The radicals' identity was the culture of the sixties but this offered them little in terms of economic convictions (Mata and Lee 2007). "Radical economics" was thus, circa 1969, still to be demarcated and defined.

In its early years, URPE's office was housed at Ann Arbor, site of the University of Michigan. But Ann Arbor did not delimit the Union. Publicized in academic conferences and through New Left organizations, URPE briskly won a substantial membership.⁴ The URPE collective that was most visible to the media and most engaged in debate with the profession's mainstream was based at Harvard University. The junior faculty and graduate students at Harvard enjoyed privileged access to the top journals of the profession and to the sessions of the annual convention of the American Economic Association.⁵ Their academic focus contrasted with the concerns of other URPE members that ranked activism above scholarly interests.⁶ Hence, while the Harvard group was not representative of the whole community of radical economists, it had a leadership role in that community's academic campaigns. The story of Harvard is my entry point to examine the interactions between radical economists and their conventional colleagues.

⁴ Within three months of its creation URPE had more than 300 paying members and a mailing list with more than 800 entries (Bluestone 1969, 5). Members continued to rise at a rate of about 40 per cent annum until it peaked in 1974–5 (URPE Newsletter 1976).

⁵ An illustration of radicals' access to the top-journals in the field, is the controversy begun in 1972 with Herbert Gintis' article in the *Quarterly Journal of Economics*. Gintis (1972) summarized the main claims of his 1969 thesis on "radical welfare economics." He combined Marxist themes of alienation with the notion of "social system" in the writings of Talcott Parsons. Parsons wrote a detailed objection to the economist's "neo-marxist" reading of his work (Parsons 1975). Gintis' reply closed with: "Politics aside, I find myself quite unmoved by the criticisms presented by Parsons, and would urge him, along with other social scientists, to turn their ample talents toward investigating the most pressing social issue of our time: the transition to a humane and democratic socialism" (Gintis 1975, 302).

⁶ The divide widened in the mid-seventies and came to a dramatic unfolding in the 1975 summer meeting of the Union. It was then agreed that URPE should abandon joint activities with activist left-wing collectives and re-affirm its commitment to education. The details of that controversy are fairly independent from the subjects of this essay (see Mata 2005).

The core activity of the Harvard group was to run an undergraduate course. Starting in the spring of 1969 “Social Sciences 125 – The Capitalist System: Conflict and Power” was offered in the General Education program.⁷ It had followed the creation of a student-run course Social Relations 148 and 149, in the fall of 1968: “Social Change in America” and “Radical Perspectives on Social Change.” An immediate success, the latter courses had 750 students enrolled.⁸ The radical economics course was taught by twelve graduate students and young faculty: Arthur MacEwan officially as the course proprietor; Samuel Bowles, Herbert Gintis, and Thomas Weisskopf sharing both the lecturing and the section meetings.⁹ The course was a focal point to design a radical body of economic theory. A book of original and reprinted texts from Social Science 125 was one of the results of this effort (Edwards et al. 1971).¹⁰

While Harvard radicals experimented with pedagogy and a new syllabus, crisis visited upon the Harvard Yard. On April 9, 1969, students seized the administration building, University Hall, to protest against University encroachment into poor neighborhoods. The President and the Deans responded to the occupation with urgency. On the dawn of April 11, local police and state troopers forcefully evicted the students with some injuries and numerous arrests. The events were of national concern.¹¹ *Time* magazine famously carried the news to its front page and concluded: “the ‘Harvard way’ had failed. No matter how soon the present crisis is resolved, the great temple of learning on the Charles will never be quite the same” (*Time*, April 18, 1969).¹²

Within Harvard an argument ensued over the administration’s response to the protest. The Faculty of Economics, otherwise known for its liberal views, broke into opposing camps. Economic historian and Russian émigré Alexander Gershenkron distinguished himself as a supporter of the Administration. At a crisis meeting of the

⁷ Similar courses were set up at the University of Michigan and at the New School for Social Research in New York (URPE 1970b and New School 1971).

⁸ According to an informant’s recollection there were about 150 students taking the economics course, with a dozen MIT undergraduate and graduate students, although not all from economics (interview with Laurie Nisonoff, 2003).

⁹ The junior faculty radicals demanded that the course receive economics credits. There was some support from the tenured faculty, but the majority opposed their proposal (interview with Arthur MacEwan, 2003).

¹⁰ Beyond their curricular content (Zweig 1972), radical courses were also a stage for new pedagogies. The desire for social transformation was brought to bear on the relationships between teacher and students. Radicals noted that: “It is necessary for our own liberation as well as for the student’s welfare to break down authoritarian relations in the classroom” (Edwards and MacEwan 1970, 361). Grading was seen as serving the interests of the *status quo*: “Grades provide employers and graduate schools with a costless means of ranking students for their own purposes.” As an alternative the Harvard Soc 125 staff would write evaluations of students’ work and meet with them to discuss their progress (ibid., 362). The radicals’ focus on education led them to a study of its economics, notably Bowles and Gintis 1976.

¹¹ Lipset (1975) prepared for the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, situated the sixties protests within the wider frame of Harvard’s historical experience with politics and student unrest. The long outlook however led the author to shy away from discussing the specific issues of the sixties.

¹² In national newspapers it was front page news, with reports of the unfolding events for several days.

Faculty he delivered an emotive speech striking that: “Force and crime must be met by force, and I think that was done, and I think it was well done.” He had little sympathy for the students’ case, adding “how preposterous, how irrelevant the issues are about which we are talking here” (Dawidoff 2002, 314–8). At the opposite corner was Wassily Leontief, also a Russian émigré. He too was critical of the occupation but the focus of his attack was on the President’s conduct calling it “drastic” and noting that “the confidence of many members of the Faculty in the administration . . . is I think, undermined” (Eichel et al. 1970, 168). Another notable economist, John Kenneth Galbraith, had in the previous year written to the *Harvard Alumni Bulletin* urging a restructuring of the University’s governance (Parker 2005, 474). Galbraith wanted more power entrusted to Faculty over the Corporation, and this became the banner of the liberal faction. The issue of governance was the critical one for the liberals, but a minor concern for the conservatives. Finally, one should add that the young radical faculty, some of whom had participated in the occupation, were unflinching supporters of the protest.¹³ From then on Harvard economists were troubled by these divisions of opinion.¹⁴

As tempers flared, senior Harvard faculty denounced radical courses as a “disgrace to scholarship” (Nossiter 1969). One said of the student assault, “I felt as if I had been raped.” Many on the conservative camp were otherwise liberal minded, some European émigrés “detected more than a trace of the fascist brown or the Bolshevik red shirt in the student protests” (Keller and Keller 2001, 311). The emotions at Harvard reflected a change in attitude toward student protest. While there was growing opposition against the war in Vietnam there was also decreasing tolerance towards students’ disruptive protests (Caute 1988). As campus turmoil continued to rise, faculty sympathy turned to disgust, while convincing radicals of the possibility of wedging change to the academy and society.

In the aftermath of the 1969 summer, radicals wanted to challenge the economics profession for its silence over the Vietnam war, adding charges of racism, sexism, and elitism in its job market. In the fall, URPE’s *Newsletter* carried an item headed “Confronting the AEA [American Economic Association].” It began provocatively: “Should URPE demand ten million dollars in reparations from the AEA for the brainwashing its members have received at the hands of the profession?” (URPE 1969a, 1). In December at the AEA’s business meeting, they staged a protest: “a group of approximately twenty-five members of ‘a group of radical economists’ filed into the meeting room. Their spokesman, Harvard’s Arthur MacEwan, demanded, on behalf

¹³ In the aftermath of the protest, the Harvard conservatives called for immediate suspension of four professors found among the students during the police raid, one was from economics. None was punished thanks to careful maneuvering by the faculty (Keller and Keller 2001, 322–3).

¹⁴ Interview with Herbert Gintis, 2003. Gintis referring to Gershenkron in an interview with Nicholas Dawidoff, noted: “I admired him and he hated me.” And as in the case of Gershenkron and Galbraith wounds never healed (Dawidoff 2002, 300, 324). For a meticulous rendering of the crisis events, see Eichel et al. 1970.

of the group, that he be permitted to present a statement to the meeting” (AEA 1970, 487). The statement read:

economists do not merely praise the system; they also supply the tools – indeed, they are the tools – instrumental to the elite’s attainment of its unjust ends. They show how to manipulate people so that the system’s hinges are smoothly oiled . . . the AEA plays directly destructive roles in our society. It serves to insure the perpetuation of professionalism, elitism, and petty irrelevance. It serves to inhibit the development of new ideas, ideas which are reflective of social reality. Our conflict with the AEA is not simply an intellectual debate . . . Our conflict is a basic conflict of interests. The economists have chosen to serve the *status quo*. We have chosen to fight it. (Ibid., 488–9)

The radicals were not alone in their criticism. Galbraith, also at the 1969 AEA convention, presented a paper calling economics a “system of belief” that excluded “urgent as well as politically disturbing questions from professional economic vision.” He trusted that the young, untroubled by professional “comfort,” would transform the profession (Galbraith 1971, 64, 87).

The radicals in economics were tapping into a growing sense of discomfort (if not of overt crisis) within the professoriate. The year before, and unprecedented in its history, there had been two professional meetings of economists and two job markets. The official AEA convention was held in Chicago as planned, but a runaway meeting was hosted in Philadelphia for those economists who wanted to boycott Chicago and condemn its mayor for violently handling anti-war activists in August of 1968.¹⁵

What this record shows is radicals moving confidently from an indictment of economists’ defective choice of subject matter to a condemnation of the content of economic theory. It is critical to note these developments occurring at Harvard. Radicals’ residence at the elite institution for economic research empowered them to raise the stakes of their polemic, the adversarial climate at the faculty urged them on. At the 1969 AEA meetings, Harvard’s Soc Sci 125 course was introduced as an outline to a new approach. Radicals dismissed the traditional curriculum, saying that: “The marginalist approach is useful only if, accepting the basic institutions of capitalism, one is primarily concerned with its administration” (Edwards and MacEwan 1970, 352). The repeated catchword that identified their alternative was a focus on “conflict.”¹⁶

¹⁵ It is important to note that similar convulsions were occurring during this period across the academy, in history, sociology, education, and to a lesser extent also among the natural sciences (see Novick 1998 and Moore 2008).

¹⁶ The degree to which radical economics abandoned the tools of neoclassical economics remains a polemical subject. Particularly, with regard to the work developed by Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis on “contested exchange,” several commentators labeled it neoclassical (Spencer 2000; McCloskey 1990). For other branches of radical scholarship the comment cannot be repeated, such as the postmodern Marxism of *Rethinking Marxism* or the financial economics of Jim Crotty and Bob Pollin. These intellectual distinctions were sharply expressed only from 1978 onwards although the retrospective historian may trace their origins to the early days of URPE.

3. A map of economics and politics overlapping

To bolster its membership and create bonds between its collectives, URPE organized a score of regional conferences.¹⁷ The most important of these meetings took place at the MIT Student Center on November 1 and 2, 1969, entitled the “New England Regional Conference.” It was jointly run by the two URPE chapters in the Boston area: one at Harvard and the other encompassing MIT and the other campuses. The main theme of the gathering was “the construction of an alternative paradigm.”¹⁸ The main speaker was Paul M. Sweezy, who proposed that Marxism was the theoretical alternative to orthodox economics. Sweezy left an appeal to go beyond a critique of orthodox economics, that: “new theoretical research must free itself from the framework of traditional economics to construct the convincing alternative which is essential to the success of any radical movement” (URPE 1969b).¹⁹

Yet Sweezy’s Marxism did not set the terms of the radicals’ debate.²⁰ URPE’s institutional base was at the University of Michigan, and the radical conversation was punctuated by the views of two Michigan graduates: Michael Zweig and John Weeks. In Zweig’s influential article, “New Left Critique of Economics,” the starting point to a critique of economics was a critique of contemporary American society as racist and imperialist (Zweig [1969] 1971a, 67).²¹ He established a correspondence between the apparatus of economic theorizing and its political content. Zweig argued that:

Marginalist analysis can be pernicious as well as irrelevant. The spirit of marginalism is one of small adjustments on the periphery of some large aggregate whose fundamental and overall character is not an issue. (This spirit is particularly well suited to the bureaucratic mind.) But the larger questions are almost never asked. The spirit of marginalism is ill

¹⁷ The first was a “Middle Atlantic Conference” in Washington, held to coincide with President Nixon’s inauguration on 18 January 1969. The morning sessions were devoted to critiquing Nixon’s economic program and discussing alternative economic development strategies. The afternoon sessions dealt with reformulations of economic theory. Lee 2004a, 190, notes over six conferences that year, held at American University, MIT, University of California at Berkeley, University of Michigan, and Oberlin College.

¹⁸ Another session of the conference that was reported in some detail in URPE’s *Newsletter* was devoted to the topic of “imperialism,” chaired by Arthur MacEwan with Harry Magdoff, Michael Tanzer, Stephen Hymer, Stephen Resnick, and David Schecter.

¹⁹ The paper was of some significance, it was published in *Monthly Review* in January 1970 and in the 1970 Spring issue of the *Review of Radical Political Economics*. Finally it was republished in the very important July 1971 *Review of Radical Political Economics* issue of which more will be said later.

²⁰ There was deep admiration for *Monthly Review*’s combativeness notably during the academic repression of the late 1950s. However, there were no close intellectual ties between *Monthly Review* and the radicals. Some radicals published in the magazine, but there was never extensive collaboration or explicit endorsement of its doctrinal line (interview with Arthur MacEwan, Richard Wolff, 2003).

²¹ The piece had first appeared in the published papers from URPE’s Philadelphia 1968 conference. It was in all likelihood the most cited article on radicals’ early critique of the mainstream, one of the few contemporary texts included in Mermelstein (1970) which surveyed the history of radical critiques of economics. I quote from its reprint in the July 1971 issue of the *Review of Radical Political Economics*.

suiting to radical questioning of the precepts of economic and social arrangements, and it is equally ill suited to deep, revolutionary change. (Ibid., 68)

Zweig denied the profession's claim to neutrality, stating that "standard economics violates neutrality by militating against asking and answering certain radical questions. Economics is not, and cannot reasonably be expected to be, neutral" (ibid., 73). In Zweig's critique, which is akin to the one voiced by the Harvard group, the faults of economics began at its theoretical foundation.

The significance of Zweig's "New Left Critique of Economics" can be gauged by having motivated the opening article of the *Review of Radical Political Economics*, URPE's scholarly journal. John Weeks began: "It is not because marginal analysis is reactionary that economics supports the *status quo*, it is because *economists are reactionary* and choose and use their questions, tools, and governments accordingly" (Weeks [1969] 1971, 75; emphasis in original). Weeks argued that the profession gained from the existing social and economic order, since "the practitioners of standard economics are part of an economic and social elite, and therefore can no more be expected to develop and encourage radical analysis than businessmen as a group can be expected to advocate workers' control of production"; "they draw their wealth and influence from these social institutions" (ibid., 75–76) and thus had a vested interest in their perpetuation.

What is novel and noteworthy in this exchange is the deliberate attempt to discriminate between radical and mainstream economists by locating them in society and culture. This effort at boundary work was meant to place radicals with the social movements calling for revolution in America and to portray the mainstream allied to the status quo. Weeks and Zweig were posing the same question: to explain what they perceived as the economics profession's unwillingness to denounce the advent of war, imperialism, and poverty. Their answers differed; one indicated the constraining character of economics' tool-kit, and the other pointed to economists' status as intellectual elite leading them to protect the status quo. Radicals' critique of economics was thus, in 1969, not consensually established.

In the July 1971 issue of the *Review of Radical Political Economics*, in an article entitled "On Radical Paradigms in Economics," the design of an alternative approach was redressed as the design of a paradigm. The introductory paper of the volume by Gerald E. Peabody surveyed Thomas S. Kuhn's work on the history and philosophy of science. The goal of the special issue was to "call for such a revolution in the paradigm that provides the world view for current economic thought" (Peabody 1971, 1). Kuhn had offered a structure to account for the past of science, but radicals wanted it to illuminate the future. Kuhn was thus read as a guide to displace the professional mainstream.²²

²² This utilitarian use of Kuhn was not unique to the economists (see, for instance, Novick 1988 and Moore 2008).

The special issue of the *Review* explored the definition of an alternative (radical) paradigm for economics. The main premises of the debate were economics' input to progressive change in America and the interplay between power (in society, in the profession) and ideas. Radical economics was defined as knowledge with the purpose "of being destructive, non conservative of the existing social order," of assisting revolution (Behr et al. 1971, 30; Zweig 1971c, 84).

The radical paradigm was dubbed by Michael Zweig a "paradigm of conflict." It asserted that "for each conflict there is a grouping of the members of society into a small number of classes. . . . A society is characterized by the conflicts it contains, and consequently by the class structures associated with these conflicts" (Zweig 1971b, 48–49). Zweig portrayed standard economics as an ideology, which disciplined people's views of the world and precluded revolutionary action. Reprising his earlier argument, he wrote: "To bourgeois economists, such non-marginal, systemic attacks are irrational and incomprehensible in economic terms. They have no intellectual or formal analytic tools to deal with such behavior" (*ibid.*, 45).²³

The interplay of "knowledge" and "life" was a major concern for the radicals. They argued that:

In choosing to be a scientist and to participate in this interaction as observer, the would-be scientist must decide whether she can accept the bounds to be placed on her experience, spending most of her working life in the role of objective, rational woman, alienated by the scientific mode of inquiry from being able to experience the observed, the Out-There, in more meaningful ways. (Behr et al. 1971, 25)

Radicals wanted to collapse boundaries. They argued that society should be experienced subjectively if it was to be experienced at all. This connected to a critique of objectivity, which they associated with the objectification of subjects, creating and maintaining a "machinelike" social system. To recover subjectivity, to join "life" and "knowledge," the radical was prescribed to abandon the confines of academe. The radical was mandated to participate in political organizations.

In the context of growing campus unrest, and while developing radical courses and literature, "Radical Political Economics" was presented in 1971 as a paradigm, and consequently as an alternative to the prevailing economic theory. Radicals believed that the public positions of the profession were structurally bound with its paradigm. They were one and the same, scientific framework and politics overlapping. Even those who earlier held a dissociation between the politics of economics (the theory) and the

²³ At the focus of the radicals' criticism, marginalism was replaced by the concepts of "harmony" and "equilibrium" to describe bourgeois economics' structuring principles. The term "bourgeois" took the place of the more commonly used terms of "conventional," "standard," "orthodox," "contemporary," and denoted Zweig's belief that "conventional economics is rooted in bourgeois ideology, and deserves an adjective which reflects that fact. One point of this paper is the demonstration of these roots and a challenge to the notion that economics is value-free" (Zweig 1971b, 43).

politics of economists (the profession), came to the view that conventional theory should be discarded for a radical alternative. John Weeks in 1972 recanted his earlier views:

He [Michael Zweig] is absolutely correct in saying that my analysis took appallingly little account of the role of capitalist institutions in conditioning our thoughts, as well as controlling our lives. The adequate understanding of these institutions is something which my formal training insured I would not learn, and while I feel I have liberated my thinking a bit, I have no pretensions to adequate understanding. It is clear that Mike has gone much further than I, and I have much to learn from him and others. (Weeks 1972, 121)

Along with Weeks others were convinced. Radicals held out a blueprint to a new economics and proudly announced it in the professional venues (see also Franklin and Tabb 1974).

Radicals' definition of an alternative economics circa 1971 was an instance of boundary work. In radicals' cultural map, we can discern two critical coordinates: the overlap of knowledge and politics and the opposition between objectivity and subjectivity. In radicals' cultural cartography the domains of science and politics were indistinct and nested the "scientific paradigms." They located their paradigm linked to the "revolutionary movement" in America, as a science for the emancipation of the downtrodden. They placed the professional mainstream as implicated with "conservative" social interests, as part of the ideology of the status quo. With neutrality held as inadmissible, paradigms and political positions were irrevocably in antagonism, distanced in the social map. With counter-cultural overtones radicals also drew attention to demarcating subjectivity from objectivity. For them objectivity was objectification and alienation. The traditional economics paradigm was said to train students to become "machine-like." In contrast, radicals located themselves in subjectivity. Their scientific approach would allow the scientist to be close to the ills of society and hence revolt against injustice. Its goal was to teach people how to live engaged in social change. This was a stark reconfiguration of the cultural landscape of economics, designed to engage social forces beyond the university.

4. A route to objectivity

The protests at the campuses and at the 1969 AEA meetings drew attention to the radical group and its economics. In less than a year the AEA's *Journal of Economic Literature* published a survey on radical economics.²⁴ The text authored by Martin

²⁴ The *Journal of Economic Literature* had begun in 1969 and its editor, Mark Perlman, had asked Martin Bronfenbrenner to write a survey article on a topic of his choosing. Bronfenbrenner chose radical economics in

Bronfenbrenner, was competent in its depiction of radicals' research and identity.²⁵ The survey was shy of a wholesale critique and instead commented on particular authors and literature. At times, Bronfenbrenner was complimentary, as in: "Like too few of the rest of us, radical economists take their teaching seriously." The survey's main conclusions in 1970 were akin to later reactions to radical economics. Firstly, that it "should be recognized as a legitimate field of concentration in the study and practice of economics." Secondly, that the profession should "require, and should continue to require, exposure of radical economists to orthodoxy." The author expected that "the rise (or revival) of radical economics in America has far to go before it recedes" and argued that this growth should occur within the profession and without antagonisms (Bronfenbrenner 1970, 758, 755, 763–5, 757).

Through most of the 1970s, radicals were eager polemicists at the AEA conventions. Worthy of special mention is their participation in the 1971 meetings.²⁶ The President-elect of the AEA in 1971 was J. K. Galbraith. Using his presidential prerogative, Galbraith outlined a program of sessions that showcased radicals' work, with headings such as: the "Military-Industrial Complex," "Some contradictions of Capitalism," papers on "taxation of the rich," radical education, and the political economy of women. The plenary lecture was delivered by the critic of American economics, Joan Violet Robinson, and Galbraith hosted a special luncheon in honor of Gunnar Myrdal, author renown for his analysis of race relations in America and the role of ideology in economic theory.²⁷ In Galbraith's Presidential Address, delivered in 1972, he sponsored the radical criticism, saying that "the main problem with orthodox economic ideas – which Galbraith asserted were under attack from a "new and notably articulate generation of economists" – is the separation of power from its subject" (Galbraith

14 March 1969, excited with the prospect of a resurgence in Marxist thought (a subject he had surveyed in 1964). At the time of this engagement, radical economics was expressed only in the Philadelphia Conference papers. Perlman responded negatively to Bronfenbrenner's first draft. The editor felt that in the paper radical economics "was only radical economists" and he could not see its content. Furthermore, he argued that Bronfenbrenner in his conclusions had been too sympathetic to the radicals while no clear benefits to the approach had been identified in the body of the survey. Contradicting Perlman's misgivings referee reports mostly praised the text (Mark Perlman Papers, The Economists Papers Project, at Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University, U.S.A., box 24).

²⁵ Bronfenbrenner was perhaps unique in being simultaneously a member of URPE and of the right-libertarian Mount Pelerin Society. Bronfenbrenner drew upon URPE publications and captured nuances that were lost to later commentators. For instance, he distinguished URPE economists from the *Monthly Review* group, and he noted radicals' concentration in the field of economics of education.

²⁶ In 1969 radicals organized a session on the "Economics of Imperialism" with papers by Richard D. Wolff, Theotonio dos Santos, Harry Magdoff, and with discussants Stephen Hymer, Victor Perlo, and Arthur MacEwan. The session was published in the meetings' Papers and Proceedings (for 1970 see Gintis 1971 and Gurley 1971).

²⁷ At the business meeting under Galbraith's chairmanship, a group of women including several URPE radicals motioned the AEA accusing the organization of making economics "a man's field" and called for greater equality in training and hiring of women economists (interview with Laurie Nisonoff, 2003). With Galbraith's support, a Committee on the Status of Women in the Economics Profession (CSWEP) was created to determine the extent of gender discrimination. In the same meeting, Galbraith opposed a motion condemning the US war in Indochina, as a violation of the Association's Charter (AEA 1972).

1973; also see Jones 1972). As it happened with many of the events involving radicals, the press was prompt to record. *Business Week* concluded that Galbraith used “the ‘establishment’ convention to focus attention on nonestablishment subjects.”²⁸ The *New York Times* reported that Galbraith: “encouraged so-called non-establishment economists to ‘get their ideas met by making their demands painful’” (Harbron 1972).

Galbraith was sympathetic to the radical cause. At Harvard, he was an ally in departmental disputes. However, he should not be taken as representative of the profession. His presidential nomination by an electoral college of the Association drew criticism, some alleging it owed more to his antiwar Democratic positions than to his economic theorizing (Parker 2005, 480).²⁹ Senior AEA members were angered by his handling of the 1971 convention. One colleague bolted: “It was the worst thing I ever saw”; another said: “He ran it like a jerk” (Collier 1973). For my purposes, the significance of the 1971 meeting was that Galbraith offered the radicals a platform that ensured the remainder of the profession would hear their challenge, take it seriously, and respond.

Interestingly, the most deliberate and detailed response to the economics of the radical left was penned by a visiting Swedish economist. In his 1969–70 trip to the USA, Assar Lindbeck had been impressed by the arguments of the New Left students. In a book entitled *The Political Economy of the New Left: An Outsider’s View*, he proposed to outline the content of New Left’s economics and show its shortcomings from the neutral position of a non-American.³⁰ Lindbeck thus based his ideological neutrality on geographical distance.

Lindbeck zoomed in on the radicals’ critique of marginalism and neglect for the “interaction between economic and political factors.” Contradicting radicals’ claims, he argued that conventional economists had insights to offer about current concerns, and that poor translation to the non-expert was the true source of public distrust. For Lindbeck, the radicals were victims to a double misunderstanding of professional distinctions. Firstly, they failed to recognize that “economists are economists only and not also at the same time sociologists, political scientists, psychologists, philosophers, and so on (or social reformers or even revolutionaries)” (Lindbeck 1971, 17, 22, 23,

²⁸ “The convention that went Galbraith,” *Business Week*, January 1, 1972: 16–17.

²⁹ Following the rules of the American Economic Association the President-elect is chosen by a Nominating Committee. In 1970 the Committee was Milton Friedman (chairman), Irma G. Adelman, Andrew F. Brimmer, Hollis B. Chenery, Albert Fishlow, and Harold M. Somers. In his memoirs, Galbraith notes: “My selection was opposed by Professor Milton Friedman, and he offered as his clinching argument that [Thorstein] Veblen had never been president. I learned after the election that this got me by” (Galbraith 1981, 31).

³⁰ Lindbeck was not clear about his sources. He seldom made references, but in his introduction he noted three compilations of New Left texts. Only one of these contained any texts by URPErs, notably Zweig’s “New Left Critique of Economics,” and it is unsurprising that Lindbeck only partially debated radical economics. That the book should not be seen as a comprehensive response to radical economics was noted by Paul A. Samuelson in the book’s foreword and by at least one of the book’s reviewers (Samuelson 1971, xvi; and Heilbroner 1972, n. 1). Nonetheless in a section titled “New Left’s Critique of ‘Traditional’ Economics,” Lindbeck’s comments do touch upon some of the radicals’ critical claims. My reading of Lindbeck is focused on that section.

25). Secondly, he stated that radicals misrepresented the old-time distinction between positive and normative economics. Lindbeck illustrated:

It is, of course, possible to study the effects on prices and quantities in the oil industry of a tax on gasoline, regardless of our feelings about the tax or about the oil industry, for that matter – an example of positive economics. The only subjective element in *positive* economics is, in principle, the choice of topic. (Ibid., 26; emphasis in original)

According to Lindbeck, within the boundaries of positive economics, away from normative demands and the other social sciences, economists could produce objective, apolitical science.

It is striking how reactions by subsequent authors were similar to Lindbeck's argument. The setting for these reflections was often the AEA convention where the radical voice was heard. One occasion that I wish to single out was the conference session, "The state of economics: the behavioral and social sciences survey," devoted to a report planning funding needs for economics' research and teaching.³¹ The debate over the report is worthy of mention because it directly addressed radical economics as an alternative approach to conventional economics.

The radical commentator was John G. Gurley,³² who objected to the report for ignoring the radicals' proposals. Gurley claimed that the report reproduced the mainstream's distorted conception of reality, "short on social relevance, precisely because its ruling paradigm – its conceptions of the world – excludes power, conflict, and disruptive change." For Gurley the political economist "studies economic problems within the historical context of ruler-subject relations, . . . he actively takes the side of the poor and the powerless, and he generally sees the system of capitalism as their oppressor." Gurley's argument was in step with the "paradigm of conflict" onto which radical economists converged in 1971 (Gurley 1971, 54–55, 62).

One of Gurley's discussants, Robert L. Heilbroner was sympathetic to what he interpreted as the radicals' motives: "to widen and deepen the range of what is called economic analysis." Yet, Heilbroner argued that defining the goals of economics was not a task for economists: "here, fortunately, the professional competence of the economist comes to an end, and he can do no more than take his place within the polity, to urge whatever goals – equality, freedom, growth, ecological balance and

³¹ The report was part of a series reviewing the various behavioral and social science disciplines and providing advice to administrators and policy makers on the needs and opportunities for their development. The reports were organized under the auspices of the National Academy of Sciences and the Social Science Research Council (Riecken 1971, 43). The report is of some historical interest since it bore the ambitious (and ultimately unreasonable) plan of massive expansion of doctoral programs in economics – a projected trebling of doctorates in ten years (Barber 1996, 23).

³² Gurley is an interesting case of an established economist, just ending his term as editor of the *American Economic Review*, who joined the radical camp. The war in Vietnam seems to have been, as in the case of Leonard Rapping (Klamer 1983), the major determinant for a radical commitment.

whatever – he seeks for society.” For Heilbroner, an economist abandoned the field of professional competence once he joined advocacy. Like Lindbeck, the damning charge was that radicals were stepping over the boundary.

The author that most clearly depicted the inner landscape of economics was another of Gurley’s discussants and a co-author of the report, Robert M. Solow.³³ In Solow’s view radical economics did not deserve mention in the report, since this body of work was neither “large” nor “important.” He added: “I think that radical economics as it is practiced contains more cant, not less cant; more role-playing, not less role-playing; less facing of the facts, not more facing of the facts, than conventional economics” (Solow 1971, 63). The author took issue with the radicals’ claim that they had an alternative paradigm: “the function of a scientific paradigm is to provide a framework for ‘normal science.’ But there is little evidence that radical political economics is capable of generating a line of normal science, or even that it wants to” (ibid., 64).³⁴ For Solow, scholarship was the interplay of “knowledge of technique and acquaintance with data” (ibid., 65) which he found absent in radicals’ practice.

In another article entitled “Science and Ideology in Economics,” Solow responded to the claim that economics was ideological.³⁵ He agreed that new and urgent subjects had emerged in the late 1960s, but made the case for patience: “It takes time for middle-aged men to change their research interests and their teaching, and it may take even longer for them to drum up any interesting and useful things to say” (Solow 1970, 94–6). Solow also accepted that economists avoided the “dangerous” questions, whose answers may challenge the status quo. But he offered two good reasons to justify the disregard: most such subjects were outside economists’ competence, and some questions were prohibitively difficult to answer. He explained that:

A study of “the size and distribution of the benefits of the war economy by socioeconomic grouping” scares me more by its impossible difficulty than by its possible subversiveness. I doubt that the data are available to do such a study with the rigor and precision that the profession now demands. (Ibid., 98)

³³ Neither critique of radical economics was conservative. The fact that liberal leaning economists were the main targets of radicals and the main defenders of the mainstream speaks to the make-up of economics’ orthodoxy in the late sixties. More importantly, radical thought emerged out of disillusionment with liberalism and only in a late stage joined various strands of Marxism. This political genesis is testified by the history of Students for a Democratic Society (see Sale 1974).

³⁴ Solow stressed the need for quantitative investigation (“calculations”) and he found that radicals were disdainful of this sort of enquiry, he added with irony: “And when and if any of them [calculations that would prove the radicals’ assertions] is done, you know who will do it – some poor damned graduate student in some conventional department, supervised by some conventional professor of conventional economics” (ibid.)

³⁵ The article was introduced as a response to Heilbroner 1970, an article in the same issue commissioned to reflect on the radicals’ critique. However, Solow is responding to more than Heilbroner’s personal interpretation of the radical critique. Questioned about the motivation for writing the article, Solow recalled it as a response to Gunnar Myrdal’s (1969) views on ideology (Personal Communication, Robert Solow, July 2007).

Solow argued for the avoidance of polemical issues as a virtue. The demanding standards of economics could not accept such “vague and unanswerable” explorations.

The choice of questions was further shown by Solow to be a device to contain the influence of ideology. He noted that:

It is a little hard to see how ideology sneaks into an attempt to discover how purchases of frozen orange juice respond to changes in price (even a socialist planning board might want to know that), or – to take something more specifically capitalist – how the plant and equipment spending of corporations is related to their sales and profits, interest rates, stock prices, taxes and other things. (Ibid., 100)

Further, it was possible “to make social science as nearly value-free as it is possible to be” by promoting scholarly criticism. Radicals were consequently invited to participate in the professional forums, and follow its rules: “standards of rigor, precision, and reliance on systematic observation interpreted by theory” (ibid., 101).

In the cultural defense of “conventional theory” there was a clear demarcation between objectivity and the subjectivity of the researcher, but a difficult boundary between science and politics. Defenders of the mainstream argued that politics and economics should remain separate. They acknowledged that there was no escape to some measure of influence from society and ideology. But, in this cartography, politics entered economics unsystematically, through individuals as part of “personal tastes,” at the starting point of any scientific voyage. Hence, it did not invalidate the enterprise of economic science.

In defense of conventional economics, these authors drew a road map of how to move away from the influence of personal tastes and closer to the ideal of “objective,” “neutral” scientific knowledge. The social scientist was told to pose sensible, quantifiable questions and then open his findings to professional criticism to separate his work from personal idiosyncrasies. This route made up of increasing “knowledge of technique and acquaintance with data” was part of a single paradigm of economics, the mainstream denying radicals’ claim that they offered a new paradigm. The radicals were seen as departing from the pursuit of science to engage politics, what Solow called “cant and role-playing.” In the mainstream’s map, the radicals, with their claims of joining politics and economics, were located at the margins of science.³⁶

³⁶ While the cultural map championed by radical economists was certainly drawn anew from the resources of sixties left-wing activism, the mainstream’s map was an old one. The economics profession boundary between objectivity and advocacy has been repeatedly enacted throughout its history (see Furner 1975 and Coats 1985). This in turn suggests that boundaries can become institutionalized and need only be rediscovered, not redesigned, a finding that sociologists of professions have long reported (Abbott 1988).

5. Political discrimination as contested space

The record to examine the resolution of this controversy, as is so often the case in boundary work, is the hiring and firing of scholars. As young radicals began to be considered for tenure most saw it refused, others were even denied renewal of contracts. Harvard as the site of the most notable group of radicals was stage to one of the most visible clashes over hiring between radicals and mainstream.

Samuel Bowles was considered for tenure at Harvard in 1972–73.³⁷ He received the sponsorship of three of the most prominent members of the department: Wassily Leontief, Kenneth J. Arrow, and Galbraith. Yet despite such impressive backing, Bowles's promotion was turned down by a five to nineteen faculty vote. The head of the Harvard department, James Duesenberry, accepted that the decision was tantamount to an assessment of radical economics: "We have people here who are claiming to have a substantial set of new developments. I simply have to say that, in my opinion, the amount of evidence they have put on the table has just not been that significant" (Lifschultz 1974, 28). Duesenberry echoed the standard assessment among conventional economists. Radical economics was seen as "negligible," not to be rejected, but to be "neglected" (Solow 1971, 63). Bowles was not the only radical at Harvard who was refused a reappointment with tenure. Soon after, the decision was made not to reappoint Arthur MacEwan. The press noted the double denial of tenure (Weintraub 1973) and recorded that similar decisions had been made in the past for Herbert Gintis and Thomas Weisskopf.³⁸ Student pressure and the media attention succeeded in reversing the decision over the employment of Gintis who was offered a new three-year contract (Lifschultz 1974, 28–29).

Harvard was home to one of the largest groups of radical graduate students and faculty. Although some students remained in the graduate program, the tenure decisions effectively dissolved the group. A couple of years later, a report on Harvard's teaching castigated it for being too narrowly focused, and that same year Wassily Leontief, a Nobel laureate, resigned from the department disillusioned and critical (Golden 1975a). The pressure led to the hire of a radical graduate student, William Lazonick, to cater a continued demand for radical subjects.

Following the very public case of Bowles and MacEwan, a string of non-renewal of contracts occurred in 1974: four from San Jose State University, one from Lehman

³⁷ Bowles joined the Harvard faculty in 1965 from Yale. On his arrival, Bowles did not hide his leftist convictions; he refused to sign the State's loyalty oath and was threatened with dismissal. Loyalty oaths were instituted during the 1950s Red-scare years, as historian Helen Schrecker has shown "Almost every state, whether or not it investigated its universities or had them investigate themselves, imposed some kind of a loyalty oath on its teachers. . . . By the late fifties, thirty-two states required loyalty oaths" (Schrecker 1986, 116). Bowles opposed what he saw as "an interference with freedom of speech" and succeeded in defeating the University authorities, remaining in the economics faculty. For this he benefited from "very encouraging support from my own department and elsewhere." *New York Times*. "Bowles's son to fight loyalty oath." March 11, 1966: 9.

³⁸ "2 Held Losing Harvard Posts Due to Politics" *Los Angeles Times*, January 3, 1973: 21.

College (CUNY) and one from the University of Massachusetts – Boston, again seizing the media’s attention (Golden 1975b, F1). The events at San Jose were particularly disturbing, since it culled what had been a center for radical scholarship in the West Coast. The dismissals were made by administrative decision, contravening a previous departmental vote (Rowe 1974, D6). The URPE steering committee branded the firings as politically motivated: “an attempt to get at those teachers who have good and close connections with students – at those who point the finger at capitalism” (cited in Golden 1975b, F1).

Reacting to the growing threat placed on their employment, URPE protested the AEA meetings in San Francisco, in December 1974. “About 60 radical economists, representing the Union of Radical Political Economists [sic], picketed the economic association presidential address late Sunday to protest the firings chanting such slogans as ‘they say cutback, we say fight back’” (Rowe 1974, D6).³⁹ With no stated endorsement from URPE, William H. Behn and Henry M. Levin presented to the meeting four proposals on the subject of hiring. In a resolution that made direct reference to the events at San Jose State University and Lehman College,⁴⁰ they called for the AEA to “establish a standing committee, the Committee on Political Discrimination, whose members shall be appointed each year by the President of the Association to collect information on issues of fact in cases involving termination of employment for alleged political reasons” (AEA 1975, 444).⁴¹ Although opposed by some who felt the committee would replace the mandate of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), the motion was voted and approved by the majority.

The appointed chairman to the committee was Kenneth J. Arrow. It is significant that Arrow, then in the Harvard faculty, was chosen for the task. Arrow had been supportive of his fellow radical colleagues. He was beyond suspicion of being aligned with either conservative or radical politics. Harvard’s public image had been tainted by the non-tenure decisions on the radicals, and it was desirable that one of its faculty be the maker of peace.⁴²

³⁹ To have expected some form of response from the AEA was not unreasonable, the previous year John G. Gurley had been elected to the Vice-Presidency of the association and Paul M. Sweezy to its Executive Committee. Furthermore, the acting president for 1974 (and therefore presiding over the proceedings) was Robert Aaron Gordon, father of David Gordon, a radical at the New School for Social Research.

⁴⁰ The last and most ambitious of the proposals urged “economic departments to take immediate measures to attract and hire permanent (tenure track) economists working in the Marxian economic paradigm” (AEA 1975, 442). The motion was found out of order and was never subject to discussion. Two other resolutions dealt with political discrimination of students and publicity of job openings.

⁴¹ In the 1972 meetings there had been a motion denouncing political discrimination and asserting the Association’s strong condemnation of discrimination against radicals in hiring decisions or government grant allocation (AEA 1973). However, this had not been accompanied by direct action by URPE, neither did it produce such a clear result as the creation of the Committee on Political Discrimination.

⁴² Arrow’s sympathy towards the radicals seems sincere; he recalled in a recent interview: “There were at least three former presidents of the AEA at Harvard at the time, and all of us were for Bowles, and of course he lost.

The AEA Committee on Political Discrimination concluded three reports in 1976. The first concerned a dismissal at the University of Massachusetts at Boston Harbor. The junior professor had her contract suspended with the promise that once she submitted her PhD thesis she would be reinstated. However, after approval of her Harvard thesis with a high grade, she was denied a new contract on the grounds that her work was lacking in quality. After interviews with members of the department, the Committee found:

no basis for criticizing the Personnel Committee on political grounds. The issues raised dealt with matters as methods of verifying hypotheses, precision in the formulation of propositions and ideas, command of the scholarly literature to which the thesis is intended to contribute, cogency of expression and exposition, critical evaluation of sources, and so forth.

But in a comment accompanying the report, the committee qualified its judgment:

it seems important to stress that the thesis lay beyond the boundaries of traditional work in economics in its methodology. Any work of this sort runs the risk of being considered by some at the leading edge of research (and in this sense to be “revolutionary”) while others will find it lacking in the basic concepts and techniques that are the mark of a competent researcher in the discipline.⁴³

Concerning the case at Lehman College, the Committee found that: “the Department appears intolerant of new ways of teaching and research, in particular, giving little or no credit to teaching and publication in Spanish. On the other hand, it found no definite evidence that the discrimination, which certainly appears real, is based on political motives.” There was a sense that “normal procedures had been bypassed” but no condemnation was issued.⁴⁴

The Committee produced a joint and lengthy report for the San Jose cases. The conflict seemed to have originated over the election of a department chairman, an appointment made by the administration against the majority of the faculty vote. The AEA committee was unequivocal in denouncing violations of procedural rules both in the nomination of the chairman and in bypassing the personnel committee for employment decisions. But even as the report came out condemning the University administration as violating academic freedom, it deemed such issues out of its jurisdiction. The report concluded that “such that intra-university politics, per se,

In some sense there is a body of opinion that is out there that is not represented by the elite, and it is often less open to innovation than is the elite” (Colander et al. 2004, 298).

⁴³ “Report Fact-Finding Panel . . .” June 2, 1975. Kenneth J. Arrow Papers, Economists’ Papers Project, Rare Books, Manuscripts and Special Collections Library, Duke University, Box 6.

⁴⁴ “Report of the Committee on Political Discrimination to the Executive Committee, American Economic Association, 19 March 1976,” Arrow Papers, Box 8, folder “AEA – Committee on Political Discrimination.”

are to be distinguished from the 'political reasons' alluded to therein such that they do not belong to the Committee's jurisdiction."⁴⁵

The Committee's ineffectiveness was blatant and acknowledged by its members. They reported to the AEA Executive Committee that their "original mandate will rarely, if ever, be feasible to execute." They were searching for "direct factual evidence" of political discrimination. In compliance with the conventional cultural map where science and politics stood separate, it was necessary to observe the foreign interference of political discourse into the evaluation of a radical's work. The Committee members recognized this was a very demanding burden of proof: "it must be candidly said that if political factors did enter, say in evaluation of research or of teaching, it would require only the slightest skill on the part of administrators or departments to conceal the fact. Indeed it might require no skill at all because the factors may well be operating at an unconscious level."⁴⁶ The Committee on Political Discrimination was constitutionally designed to impose the cartography of conventional economics even as its members protested that it was not a good description of the social landscape.

For radicals political discrimination was inherent in any evaluation of scholarly work, even if it appeared couched in technical language. Bowles made the interpretative difference explicit when he wrote to the AEA's Secretary, "In the last analysis, the evaluation of all scholarly work is and must be informed, at least in part, by considerations which extend far beyond the boundaries of the science, necessarily reaching into realms which would generally be considered political" and he added "failing to locate a 'smoking gun,' as you put it, the committee is generally reduced to a finding of no political discrimination, even in situations which bear a very strong ideological and even petty political odor." Bowles declined the invitation to be a member of the committee.⁴⁷

In 1976 the Committee had a total of eight cases under investigation. To the national media, Arrow explained that there was great difficulty in determining whether dismissals resulted from political beliefs, the quality of a professor's work, or the recession, which had forced some colleges to lay off faculty (Epstein 1976, A29).⁴⁸ A feeling of frustration led the Committee to propose that it "receive complaints and indeed encourage them. However, it should turn over the complaints to the AAUP

⁴⁵ "American Economic Association Committee on Political Discrimination. Panel Report: San Jose State University Cases," Arrow Papers, Box 8, folder "AEA – Committee on Political Discrimination."

⁴⁶ "Report of the Committee on Political Discrimination to the Executive Committee, American Economic Association, 19 March 1976," Arrow Papers, Box 8, folder "AEA – Committee on Political Discrimination," p. 6.

⁴⁷ Letter from Samuel Bowles to Dr. C. Elton Hinshaw, May 8, 1978. Arrow Papers, Box 8, folder "AEA – Committee on Political Discrimination."

⁴⁸ The radicals acknowledged the effects of the recession leading to reduction in faculty numbers, but warned that this would serve as a cover for pursuing political firings (URPE 1970c, 5).

and offer its cooperation.”⁴⁹ By 1977 the Committee on Political Discrimination was no longer accepting new cases and was forwarding all complaints to the AAUP (AEA 1978, 450).⁵⁰ Later in the decade according to Jordan Kurland, the acting general secretary of the AAUP, the number of cases of dismissal began to fall (Epstein 1976, A29), the then Committee chairman Carl Stevens agreed (AEA 1979, 384).

The Committee did not report to the Executive Committee from 1978 to 1981 when it concluded its investigation on the case of Peter Bohmer at U.C.–San Diego from 1972. The committee had taken four years to appoint a team to investigate the case and two more years to write a report. It concluded by majority that there had been political discrimination. The conclusion was facilitated by evidence that the FBI had funded the harassment of several radicals, Bohmer included (AEA 1981). This was an instance of foreign interference of politics.⁵¹

The response by the AEA, elusive in its conclusions and unwilling to be drawn into faculty disputes, only gave credence to the radicals’ suspicion towards the profession. To preserve their jobs, the formerly outspoken dissenters were attempting to go unnoticed, as the *New York Times* revealed:

With university jobs generally scarce these days, some so-called “closet radicals” have tried to sneak onto campuses by sending in job resumes that hide their radicalism. Others, who already have jobs, try to keep their jobs by having mail from the Union for Radical Political Economics sent to their homes rather than to the office, where anti-radical department chairmen might notice. (Golden 1975b)

The Committee enacted the conventional economists’ map of culture, denying any intimate overlap between science and politics. The radicals dismissed were tagged as doing less relevant and low quality work, a “negligible” scholarship that was beyond the pale.

⁴⁹ “Report of the Committee on Political Discrimination to the Executive Committee, American Economic Association, 19 March 1976,” Arrow Papers, Box 8, folder “AEA – Committee on Political Discrimination.”

⁵⁰ The 1978 case report’s summary was that “the Committee is unable to judge the merits of the department’s grounds for not reappointing [Professor X]. The Committee finds no evidence, however, that the reappointment decision was based on political discrimination.” Arrow commented to the new Committee President, Carl Stevens: “I must say I have the distinct feeling that [X] was treated harshly and very likely in a discriminatory fashion, but he did not get clear evidence that the motivation was political.” Letter from Carl Stevens to Kenneth Arrow, April 14, 1978, reply from Arrow dated April 20, 1978. Arrow Papers, box 8.

⁵¹ Lee (2004b) has researched a larger number of cases of dismissal and what can only be termed bullying of radicals. I have focused here on the major cases, those that reverberated in the AEA and caught national media attention.

6. Migration from Harvard to University of Massachusetts at Amherst

The emergence of radical economics comprised an instance of boundary work in social science. Radicals redrew the cultural map of economics to force a realignment of interests and language that would engage the social ferment of the 1960s and 1970s. They aimed to enlist the support of the radical students. To an extent they succeeded. At Harvard, it was thanks to student pressure that Herbert Gintis' contract was renewed. At Yale University, similar protests by graduate students led to the hiring of David Levine, also a graduate student, to teach courses in the history of economics and Marxian economics (Lifshultz 1974, 53). As radical faculty faced threats from senior faculty and administrators, student pressure was effective in reversing dismissal decisions even if never securing them tenure. Conventional economists responded to the radical challenge by enlisting the traditional audiences of economics. Their boundary work reaffirmed the possibility for objective judgment in isolation from the partisan debates that were troubling American society. They stated that the economist need not, should not take sides, and their proposal was a retreat from public exposure.

In the contest between cultural cartographies there was a victor. Mainstream economists were correct to predict that campus unrest and the surge in the left-wing would soon abate. By 1972, the campuses were quieting and a conservative mood began to take hold. Once without allies, one might have expected a removal of radicals from academia. This was not the case, radicals were marginalized but not expelled.

Denied tenured posts at the elite institutions where they had obtained their PhDs, notably Harvard and Yale,⁵² many radicals found employment in less prestigious universities or in liberal arts colleges that gave them limited opportunity for research. The majority dispersed throughout the country. A few managed to cluster in departments where radical graduate programs could be designed and research along academic lines could be pursued. Their most significant achievement was at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, which remains today the principal center for radical research. Amherst lies 90 miles west of Boston. Traditionally rural, Amherst and neighboring Northampton have long been a hub of higher learning, currently site of the Five Colleges (Amherst, Hampshire, Mount Holyoke, and Smith Colleges, and University of Massachusetts at Amherst). Founded in 1867, the Massachusetts Agricultural College became the University of Massachusetts in 1947, with a department of economics since 1935 (Cary 1963, 156, 183). The University underwent a dramatic expansion during the postwar period, tripling enrollments and staff on two occasions: from 1947 to 1954 and from 1962 to 1972. The administration envisioned University of Massachusetts at Amherst modeled on the great public universities at Berkeley and Ann Arbor, reaching a student population of twenty

⁵² There were also left-wing economists at west coast universities whose emergence was largely independent from URPE. The eastern bias of URPE was a source of institutional strife within the organization from 1974 onwards (see, for instance, URPE 1975).

thousand (Story 1992, 52, 69). Despite the expansion the rural surroundings were never fully erased. In 1973, to radicals' eyes Amherst was still "a cow town" with cattle grazing the fields encircling the campus.⁵³ But also at this time, a community of left-leaning artists and academics converged on the area (Gabrielsky 1988).⁵⁴ This community made the rural seclusion more tolerable.

The origins of a radical center at Amherst are tied to the dismissal of Samuel Bowles from Harvard. Since 1967 the University of Massachusetts at Amherst economics department had been in a state of troubled transformation. It received poor assessments by two external committees (in 1967 and again in 1971) despite an investment in hiring "high flyers," mainly "mathematical economists, . . . to the avoidance of such traditional fields as macroeconomics, public policy, monetary theory, and economic history" (Lifschultz 1974, 30). In 1971–72, alongside the disputes over hiring that split the faculty, another conflict was added over the dismissal of a radical and popular teacher, Mike Best. The University administration had sidestepped the department and decided to renew Best's contract. The head of the department saw the interference as undermining the department's authority and his own, and resigned. In a move to heal the divisions in the economics department, the Dean of the faculty was nominated its acting head. Concerned by a fall in the number of undergraduates in economics, Dean Alfange came to agree with the criticism that hiring had been too narrowly focused (*ibid.*, 52).

Bowles had taken a year off from Harvard in 1972–73 and was at University of Massachusetts at Amherst's Labor Center. Predicting the problems he would face with the upcoming "tenure or out" decision, Bowles showed interest in joining the University (Walsh 1978, 34). His bargaining power was patent in that he did not ask for a job but rather for a center of radical research, he "pointed out that one of the greatest obstacles to the development of radical scholarship in economics was that academics interested in its development were scattered and isolated from fellow colleagues" (Lifschultz 1974, 52). Bowles thus bargained that alongside his hiring with tenure, the department should also employ Herbert Gintis, Richard Edwards, Stephen Resnick, and Richard Wolff, the first two from Harvard, the others teaching at City College New York but originally from Yale. Alfange had been convinced by the references from Harvard senior faculty, Nobel laureates, and a former editor of the *American Economic Review*, and by Galbraith's presidential commentary on the profession.⁵⁵ In 1976 the department of twenty-five members had ten who would

⁵³ Interview with Herbert Gintis, 2003.

⁵⁴ For more on the social makeup of Northampton, the social and commercial center of the region, see Gaffney 2005.

⁵⁵ As Alfange faced criticism for the hiring of radicals, his comments in a memorandum repeated Galbraith's 1972 Presidential Address and the radicals' appraisal of the profession: "It seemed to me impossible . . . for the department to continue to remain insensitive to the ferment taking place within the discipline of economics, in which a substantial number of economists – including some of the most prestigious members of the profession – were challenging the dominant neo-classical paradigm and calling into question the ability of the profession

accept the label of radical. Hence, graduate students with strong credentials were attracted to the department, which pleased some of their conventional colleagues in the department and the University's administration (Walsh 1978, 34–35).

Although University of Massachusetts at Amherst hosted the most influential group of radical economists, it was not the only place where radicals were able to maintain radical courses and a graduate program. Other departments that merit mention were at American University in Washington D.C. and at the New School for Social Research in New York City. On the West Coast there were also groups of radicals at Stanford University⁵⁶ and at the University of California at Riverside,⁵⁷ but these were embattled and undermined in influence.

By 1976 radical economics was thus no longer a feature of Harvard, MIT, or Yale but a major voice coming out of University of Massachusetts at Amherst, and the New School. The departments mentioned were “radical departments” insofar as they supported radical research and despite radicals being always a minority. As a result of their relocation away from the elite campuses the threat of dismissal and the quieting of campuses in the mid-1970s, radical economists retreated from full confrontation with the profession. Within the halls of academia theirs was a critical voice, but no longer scandalous or disruptive. Radical economics had been marginalized.

7. Conclusion: the authority of place

I have approached the emergence of the “radical economics paradigm” in the context of academic debates between radicals and the mainstream of the economics profession. I have endorsed the notion of boundary work as an interpretative frame to represent the different cultural outlooks of radicals and mainstream, ultimately expressed in the discussions and judgments of the AEA's Committee on Political Discrimination. It was the difference between these two outlooks upon society and academic practice that fuelled conflict.

utilizing that paradigm adequately to deal with many of the most urgent social problems in the nation and the world” (Lifschultz 1974, 52).

⁵⁶ At Stanford University in 1975 and “following a four-year student struggle, the economics department established a field in ‘Alternative Approaches to Economic Analysis’” (URPE 1970a). The origin of this group should be credited to the conversion to radical economics of John Gurley, a former editor of the *American Economic Review* and tenured faculty member. He was soon joined by Duncan Foley and Don Harris who had in that year become a tenured faculty member. This was a small group in a large department, non-belligerent and somewhat ineffectual (Colander et al 2004, 196–201; see also Christiansen 1974).

⁵⁷ At the University of California – Riverside, acceptance of radical economists was won after a two-year battle. The most prominent radicals there were Howard Sherman and E. K. Hunt. The department's chairman Roger Ransom commented on the presence of 3 radicals in the 11 strong department: “I don't think that makes our department radical . . . but it's more than a sidelight.” Ransom's assessment of the radicals was: “‘I think the radicals are weak on analysis . . . but they are very strong on laying out the issues and this turns students on.’ As a result they swarm to the radicals' classes” (Trombley 1975).

The insight that comes from the story of radical economists' challenge is that place is an asset in boundary work. Radicals' redrawn outlook on American society aligned their efforts with the interests of left-leaning students. However, the support radicals deserved from some distinguished colleagues and the coverage they got from the media cannot be explained in the same terms. Enhancing radicals' credibility was the authority of place.⁵⁸ It was radicals' credentials as Harvard faculty that opened access to professional forums, notably the sessions of the AEA conventions and its published Papers and Proceedings. Place granted radicals authority and once they challenged the mainstream in a contest of credibility it was a change of place that expressed resolution. Notably, Harvard radicals' migration to Amherst, from city to countryside, from a private institution to a public one, was a marker of their marginal status in the academy.

The fortune of radical economics contrasts with that of sister movements in history and sociology. Before Samuel Bowles in economics, there was Staughton Lynd in history and Marlene Dixon in sociology. Denied tenure at Yale in 1968, Lynd was recommended for five universities in the Chicago area, but in all of them the administrations vetoed the appointment. He finally abandoned history and became a lawyer. Lynd was expelled from the historical profession. Bowles was not expelled from his, neither were the other radical economists. But as Jonathan Wiener explains "The firing and blacklisting of Staughton Lynd marked a key moment in the formation of radical history and contributed to the adversary relationship between radicals and the mainstream of the profession" (Weiner 1989, 417). In the aftershock of the blacklisting of one of its prominent members, radical historians organized in great numbers to elect representatives to the American Historical Association. By the late 1970s, they had redrawn the boundaries of legitimate scholarship to include new methods and concepts (Weiner 1989; Novick 1988; Meier and Rudwick 1986).

While the case of history is one of radical success, what happened in sociology is closer to the case of economics. The watershed event for sociology was the denied renewal of contract of Marlene Dixon at the University of Chicago. The protest that followed set radicals and students against the faculty and after enduring intimidation the radicals left (Flacks 1988). In other elite campuses, such as Columbia University, the members of the Sociology Liberation Movement were also not welcomed. They finally clustered in three departments at the University of California at Santa Barbara, Rutgers University, and Washington University in Saint Louis. The latter was the largest but also the most short-lived of the centers. By 1972, after infighting among radicals the department collapsed (Etzkowitz 1988).⁵⁹ Radical sociology like radical economics, was marginalized.

The process is also noticeable in the early history of right-wing economics. James Buchanan and Warren Nutter did not organize their political economy group at the

⁵⁸ One could think of this distribution of authority in social space in the sense of Pierre Bourdieu's symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1988; idem 2004).

⁵⁹ See also *American Sociologist*, December 1989, 20(4).

prestigious University of Chicago from where they had graduated and with which they held a deep intellectual bond. The site for their dissent was a far-removed campus in Charlottesville, Virginia (Buchanan 1988; Breit 1987). In the late sixties, due to conflicts with the administration, the group moved 140 miles south into the mountains of Virginia. Blacksburg was the site for the continuation of dissent and the stage for a theoretical reappraisal, headed by Buchanan and Gordon Tullock, from Virginia School of Political Economy to Constitutional Economics (Buchanan 2007).

The sixties and seventies were a period of major turmoil for the social sciences, with the boundaries parsing academia and society subject to question. The majority of these contests resulted in a reasserting of the traditional rules of objectivity and a condemnation of partisanship. The marginalization of dissent was expressed in the removal of radicals from the authoritative places of their profession. Their migration in geography was a migration in cultural space.

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