

What is at stake in the idea of *economic representations*? Here's my (short) answer: I have a strong desire to disenfranchise the community of neoclassical economists of their monopoly on understanding of economic behaviour in order to give voice to that which is otherwise rendered silent and invisible.

What this implies is a decentring of certain concepts and ideas which have become iconic in the lexicon of 'the economic', for example, the individual as the base unit of analyses; the firm as a black box; profit/utility maximisation as the core component of an objective function; the production function as descriptive of the relationship between inputs and output; etc, etc, and all the presuppositions (often elliptically inscribed) which underwrite these ideas, and all the policy implications which flow from them. Notice that I advocate a decentring and not an outright refusal of these ideas, assumptions and policies. This is because I don't want to simply substitute one kind of intellectual imperialism for another (something I suspect the new Keynesians are up to). But more importantly, I'm a pluralist and find a use for some neoclassical ideas in the context of certain (albeit, limited) situations; other neoclassical ideas I find positively lunatic and wrong. I also find the aesthetics of the neoclassical iconography rather seductive in much the way I like Christmas trees and singing along with Christmas carols while being an atheist.

I know the other exists because I've seen and heard it in my work on bargaining theory, and Kath & Julie and others who choose to view the world through an alternative lens, have done brilliant work in giving visibility and voice to very different identities, desires and activities. So I want to share in this enterprise; I want to give meaning and substance to different identities, different relationships between identities, and different notions of 'value' and 'productive activity'. Like my colleagues in Bellagio, I want to bring these things 'into being'. It's a tricky business. I'm sensitive to the power wielded by the academy; it's within our author-ity to *give* voice, to *give* visibility, to the other; it's what being an author is about. Whether we like it or not, in virtue of being academics, we usually end up amongst the community of high priests with the other as our S/subject. (I've raised this issue elsewhere; see 'Look at me look at you', 1999; but better still, take a look at Joanne Martin's (1992) sensitive and multifaceted analysis of the cultures within corporate organizations, or how Michael O'Hanlon (1993) faces the ethical dilemmas involved in cultural representation within a museum setting.)

However (and it's a big *however*), there's a sticky issue in all this that I made brief reference to in my essay for our meeting in Bellagio; to wit, I am very confused by both the concept of the 'economic' and the concept of 'representation'. Put the two together (thank-you, David), and I am more than doubly baffled. (I frequently point out to students that concepts are human constructions and that we shouldn't feel terrorized by them. Concepts are there to be invented and re-invented; what matters is not how we define them, but that they are productive of meaning and understanding. In so saying, I set

myself an agenda I don't always succeed to.) As I said in my essay, I see 'the economic' everywhere and, hence, nowhere at all, and the idea of 'representation' as similarly aporetic and potentially theoretically vacuous. Yet I also find myself fascinated by the desire both to construct and refuse concepts and the typologies which underwrite them. Do you remember the typology cited by Foucault which I quoted in my essay? Here it is again because I think that inscribed within it are many of the issues associated with a notion of the economic which I can't address more fully in this short essay:

"Animals are divided into:

(a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) *etcetera*, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies." Chinese Encyclopaedia, quoted by Michel Foucault, 1970, The Order of Things, Tavistock.

When it comes to any given representation, like Evan, I find myself gripped by the 'of what?' question. What knots. The trouble is that I think all we have is representation, that there is no anterior reality. (Or, some would say, all we have is signs and symbols; for myself, I choose the term 'iconography'. But it doesn't matter how you say it, which lexicon you pluck the idea from, because it always amounts to the same.) This is an over-arching theme addressed by recent philosophical endeavours. I take consolation – I look for understanding – in the work of Martin Heidegger. He characterizes the modern period as "the age of the world picture". He says this is an epoch in which "only that which becomes object [in this way] *is* – is considered to be in being" (Heidegger, 1977, p.127); that is, phenomena come into being in and through representedness, implying that that which cannot be pictured, or objectified, cannot be. And therein lies my (longer) answer to the question of what is at stake in economic representations. It leads me to venture two questions I feel it is important to address. Since the business of objectification appears to me as unsavoury (it's the author-ity game: we 'do' something to the other which the other may be unaware of, or unwilling to have done to them, and which has serious consequences for their 'beingness'), then, is there a way of bringing into being that which is unheard and invisible in neoclassical economics yet without engaging in the business of objectification? (This issue lies at the core of most of the work I undertake. I may be 'misrepresenting' Kath & Julie's work, but I see this issue addressed in what they do.) And what, if any, are the alternatives to representedness, or iconophilia, as ways of being? Answers on (your concept of) a postcard, please.

## References

- Martin Heidegger, 1977, The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays, NY & London: Harper & Row.
- Joanne Martin, 1992, Cultures in Organizations, NY & Oxford, Oxford University Press.

- Judith Mehta, 1999, 'Look at me look at you', in Robert F Garnett, Jr. (ed.) What do economists know?, London & NY, Routledge.
- Michael O'Hanlon, 1993, Paradise: Portraying the New Guinea Highlands, London: British Museum Press (particularly the last chapter).