

LA SOCIO-ÉCONOMIE, SCIENCE D'INGÉNIERIE ?

Concevoir les organisations socio-économiques comme des artefacts évolutifs et viables

Par Jean-Robert ALCARAS, Pascal DEHAENE (†), Jean-Louis LE MOIGNE (1991)

Étude suivie de

ÉVOLUTION, RATIONALITÉ ET TÉLÉOLOGIE

L'Économique entre énergétique et pragmatique

Par Jean-Louis LE MOIGNE (1997)

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Nous présentons ici sous ce titre en français un article écrit en anglais dans le courant de l'année 1991, sous le titre *Socio-Economics as a New Science of Engineering : Designing Sustainable Complex Social Organizations as "Evolving Artifacts"* — article que nous avons conçu et écrit de concert avec notre regretté ami et collègue Pascal Dehaene († 2010). Pascal l'avait présenté pour nous trois à l'occasion d'une communication à la *Society for the Advancement of Socio-Economics, SASE annual Conference*, qui eut lieu à Irvine, en Californie, du 27 au 30 Mars 1992.

Il nous a semblé que ce texte contenait des idées toujours très pertinentes aujourd'hui : nous voudrions ainsi rendre hommage à Pascal Dehaene en la publiant sur le site du Réseau Intelligence de la Complexité, Réseau à la formation duquel il avait été étroitement associé alors qu'il préparait sa thèse.

Pour faciliter l'interprétation de ce texte par les lecteurs francophones moins familiers de la lecture de textes en langue anglaise, nous associons à cet article publié en 1991, un autre texte rédigé en 1995 et signé de Jean-Louis Le Moigne (et publié dans *Économie Appliquée, ISMEA, Tome L, 1997, n°3, p.53-69*), mais préparé en coopération avec Jean-Robert Alcaras et Pascal Dehaene qui venaient d'achever alors leurs thèses sous la direction de Jean-Louis Le Moigne : « *Évolution, Rationalité et Téléologie : L'Économique entre Énergétique et Pragmatique* ». En effet, cet article reprend en les éclairant de façon plus synthétique nombre des arguments importants présentés dans la contribution collective initiale de 1991.

Jean-Robert ALCARAS & Jean-Louis LE MOIGNE, Février 2015.

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Dans les pages suivantes, on trouvera :

- p. 2-19 : l'article en langue anglaise dans sa version originale (*Socio-Economics as a New Science of Engineering: Designing Sustainable Complex Social Organizations as "Evolving Artifacts"*; 1991).
- p. 20-29 : l'article postérieur (*Évolution, Rationalité et Téléologie : L'Économique entre Énergétique et Pragmatique*, 1997).

SOCIO-ECONOMICS as a NEW SCIENCE of ENGINEERING: Designing Sustainable Complex Social Organizations as “Evolving Artifacts”

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Intelligence ... organize the world by organizing itself

J. PIAGET (1937)

One of the main problems that *socio-economics* try to set is the one of re-introducing the complex human dimension in the peculiar project of knowledge that economists gave to themselves. If this project was to find some scientific explanations of social phenomena — through the idea that man's behavior is not completely random but led by rational principles (that had to be discovered) —, there has been some historical evolution in the development of economics; the dominant place conquered by the positivist economics (both in its Neoclassical and Marxian extremes) and "substantive forms of rationality", has led to this result that most of the economic models are not usable neither for individual nor for collective action if ever one has the project to intervene in his environment, in order to modify it in some "favorable" ways.

This epistemological problem has to be described if we want to construct more relevant models and modeling processes in order to understand the complexity of human phenomena, the reasons that lead social groups to transform their environments by designing and implementing artificial means, and the processes this has to be worked through if the individuals, the organizations and their common environments are to be managed jointly in some "sustainable" ways.

We will see that this is part of the new project of knowledge socio-economists could give to themselves. This is what we would like to suggest by saying that socio-economics, if one places its scientific developments in *constructivist perspectives and epistemologies*, could be considered as a *new fundamental engineering science*. It would deal with the understanding and the modeling of the complex processes (peculiarly cognitive ones) by which organizations are (or should be) built and successfully implemented - through human action and "procedural" forms of rationality, in self-organizing environments considering sustainability criterias.

FROM "WHAT IS" TO "WHAT COULD BE"

The traditional economic science: natural science of "what is" (or "what was")

The purpose here is not to provide a detailed discussion about positivist epistemologies, but to sketch in how far most economists have a positivist conception of economic problems and the consequence it has in their ways both of theorizing and being normative for individual or political action.

* Nous souhaitons rééditer cet article rédigé initialement en 1992 en hommage et à la mémoire de notre collègue et ami Pascal DEHAENE († 2010) qui présenta cette étude réalisée collectivement à la SASE annual Conference (Society for the Advancement of Socio-Economics, IRVINE, California, March 1992).

The development of economies has been much influenced by the parallel development of what can be generally called "natural sciences": physics, biology, astronomic, geology, etc. Before World War II, the scientist's general object was to discover, in every autonomous field of knowledge the elementary mechanisms that had to exist somewhere ("down there" or "up there"), supposed simple, that were governing the universe' order. If ever this was difficult in practice, the problem was to be solved with enough time and efforts. Along the path of our progression up to these evidences and therefore Reason, we could find some general and stable laws or structures (the general "causes") explaining things and events (the "effects"). The scientist's work was the one of Scientific Discovery. The legitimate scientific proceedings, positivist, was reduced to the following philosophical assumptions: there exists some objective evidences independent from the observer and that we can clear out methodologically, through decomposition or division from "the rest": analysis.

The Scientifics whose autonomous object was economic assumed phenomena were impressed by the results this attitude and methods help to gain in the understanding of what was speculated to be nature's non-human manifestations (even if this relative consensus was to be shacked by further numerous controversies), were also much influenced by two general metaphors: the *mechanical* and the *energetical* ones.

-According to the *mechanical metaphor*, any object or stable phenomena (effective), however complicated it could be, is susceptible of decomposition into its elementary parts (causes); the general linear pattern relating the long chain of these causes in order to produce the effect (efficient cause), isolatedly considered could be approached through statistical means (simple or multiple regression) since the stability of the phenomena was assumed.

-The *energetical metaphor* was established from this old observation which led to the so-called "least action principle" and which seems to characterize very often physical (or natural) phenomenas such as light: a ray of light always goes through air or matter out along the shortest path predictable to human observer. From this principle one could deduce and generalize that there was some kind of rationality (light is efficient) in Nature and that this peculiar form of rationality could be and consequently should be imitated. The *efficiency* of any process (in economies the production of goods) could therefore be evaluated through the calculus of the ratio comparing the measurable inputs to the measurable outputs, even if we don't know what this process is for!

The influence of these two paradigms is probably to be found in the extraordinary developments two other related models found in economic science (and peculiarly neo-classical ones), the *optimization model* and the *equilibrium model*. We can see here in which way we can associate them to our deeply unconscious conception of human rationality as well modeled by this mechanical process called optimization that, if applied with strict observance, meant efficient action but also the equilibrium of whatever individual entity considered through marginal equalization calculus (see for instance the discussion of the SEU maximization principle presented in by H.A Simon (1983)). The other great belief related to this conception is that if every individual entity in the economy was in equilibrium, then the whole economy is in equilibrium and thus is realized the efficient (Pareto optimal) use of all resources previously considered. There was little to say about the way an individual, an organization, a market or all the markets went from one equilibrium (and it was always the starting point) to an other. We know now that these assumptions, strongly criticized by the Austrian school, for example, were non confirmed by empirical observations but most of all prevented us to think about the way people did act and feel, looking much more for means of cognitive equilibration (J. Piaget) under dynamic circumstances (complex environments).

Positivist economics, normative economics and economic policies

These positivist-oriented beliefs had considerable influence in the manner to consider human action:

- It was *assumed to be determined by laws and susceptible of analytical modeling* through linear mathematical models (and they could be systems of equations). It would have had little consequences if economists stayed on their chairs in their offices and universities. Since this knowledge had been produced by the means of this "natural-science-like" rigor, it could be somewhat not too far from reality and therefore it was assumed to convey some "truths".

- *Intended to regulation* since there should be somewhere some ideal reality (steady state? perfect equilibrium? stationary economy?) that had not been defined but that probably should (would) emerge sometime (in the long period for instance).

If ever one tended to assimilate the model to reality, there was not much more to go ahead to *move from positive to normative economics* and thus to influence economic policies worked by the government. Following the relations drawn by the economic laws designed through econometrical and Operations Research technics, if one wanted to influence the system (producing effects) in order to drive it back or towards some sort of quantified level (the "explained variable" in the model), for example: a given rate of inflation or growth, he just had to bear on the levers related to the causes (the "explaining variables" or control variables) supposed to produce the wanted effect. The most eloquent example of such a candid belief can be found in the policies driven by the "Phillips Curve" relating the inflation and employment rates.

The most explicit influence of this simplification of economic systems is that neither the effects produced were really obtained nor did the economist gain some understanding of plausible human intelligence. The fact that the individuals are able to produce counter-effects (counter-strategies) to manipulation trials was pointed out by the economists of Rational Expectations School; but unfortunately and paradoxically they turned out to produce some models of perfect knowledge reached by individuals!

Thus much time and energy were spent in defending a *rather unusable model of "intelligence"* known in the literature as the *theory of choice* or the *Subjective Expected Utility (SEU)*, this model appears in practice to be quite unusable: the "homo oeconomicus model" is abstract, algorithmic and "automatic" (in the sense it is a program activated on the Stimulus-Response behavioral model), all characteristics rather non relevant for the description of human deliberate behaviors and not confirmed by empirical evidences (see Kahneman, Slovic, Tversky for example).

Economic science has "forgotten" the teleological complex aspects of human action

More important at that point is that economic scientists while staying embedded in their positivist convictions tended (intended?) to evade from the teleological problem. This problem is somewhat fundamental since it is closely related to the determinism problem.

Positivists generally avoid considering the fundamental problem as regards to human action, which is *to question, "how real the world is"*. Since its methods are relevant for identifying stable supposed relations between *events or facts that have happened already*, its ability to provide help for what we intend to do in the future can be questioned. In this sense traditional economists feel secure to speak about "what is" or "what was" (ex post). If they assume some form of determinism, they can make a bet on "WHAT

PROBABLY HAS TO BE" as known from the past. But surely they have little to say about "WHAT COULD BE" in the sense of "WHAT IS POSSIBLE" or "WHAT COULD BE CREATED".

Thus like all positivist human sciences, *economics can't deal with the emergence of new (never encountered) events:*

-*Because of its analytical methods* in the sense that it can't deal with complex phenomena as emerging conjunctions (interactions, dialectics) of actions;

-*By its way of considering human decision-making processes, which* can't deal with creativity, invention, design processes. The Bayesian model can describe in some specific cases learning processes, but not the design (or creation) processes.

Since we accept the assumption that man is able to act purposefully on his environment by conceiving artifacts (such human creations as organizations and institutions) that cannot be relevantly explained by some "eternal laws", by which we could have anticipated their emergence, **we have to provide some theory to answer the question "WHAT FOR?"** (for what purpose or ends) and "HOW?" (The processes leading to their construction, their "life-cycle") **rather than "WHY?"** (Cause-effects explanation)? Trying to find answers to these questions will raise at some moment the teleological problem.

The intuition of this problem was present in the early developments of economics when it was considered at "political economics":

-The *political dimension* is dealing with finalization process worked out through 1) projects given to a social group (despotism, totalitarianism) or 2) projects the social group can give to itself ("autogestion") or projects that are interpreted by its representatives (democracy): **the "ENDS"**

-The *economical dimension* dealing with the procedures and resources needed: **the "MEANS"**.

Since these dimensions are closely tied up together, the purpose of socio-economics as an engineering science is the one of studying the stable processes by which we can model and organize intentional interventions in complex environments by the means of evolutive sustainable artifacts. At this point is it necessary to deal with the epistemological problem raised by this perspective.

The new science of economic engineering: "artificial science" of "what could be"

If ever we accepted the empirical observation that man is able to build for a part the world in which he lives, then we will see that we need to understand the interactions that should emerge in *this world built by men, which also in return, builds the men that build it.*

The observation that man builds his world through his actions seems somehow like "fads". But when we want to give some response to the question "why doing this", we crone to suggest the answer "for action". Man, but also other biologic species built part of their world through action and for action.

But we can't justify action for action. If ever economics are the science of rational activities, it will not be sufficient to talk about *the way of being rational* (at a micro-economic or at a macro-economic level), we have to talk first about the *reference needed in order to evaluate this rationality*. In other words, if a decision is to be taken, we probably should think about what this decision is for: the goals or project, before thinking of the way we should select the best alternative, since we can suggest that there is a relation between the former and the later.

For a long time most of the economists thought that a natural and universal answer to this question was given by the hypothesis that any individual act in order to maximize his utility with minimum of effort, given some resources. This answer had also the interest to provide both the criteria and the process to behave rationally.

H.A Simon was not much convinced by this general theory on a double level. His first empirical observations (1947) led him to question the process. It appeared that people are not much worried by selecting the best action between the alternatives they perceive, in regards with the consequences of these actions, in relation with the expected states of the world. They can't do so correctly because they don't have the cognitive capacities and because they stop searching when they judge they found a "satisficing" solution for the problem they are actually worried by.

This theory of "**Bounded Rationality**" had then to justify the general process in which it could be intelligible. If human action will say Simon is not much concerned with utility maximization, it's because the general purpose of any living system is managing for him some kind of projects in some environments (for instance a problem of self-conservation ... or self-sustainability). In this sense, the hypothesis of utility maximization had to be replaced by the more general one of *teleological adaptation*.

The point here is not to emphasize on the relation between adaptation and selection, than to emphasize the fact that adaptation can be carried out through various procedures and paths.

Will say Simon, if man is to develop activities for adaptation "in" and "from" specific environments, than we can justify his behaviors in terms of conception of means to work out effectively this general goal much more than on the selection of the most efficient (or productive) mean *given* the set of possibilities (for example: the set of available technologies). In other words, we need to answer the first question of *constructing means* (thus of ends) before focusing attention to the one of selecting the best one, knowing of course that there are constraints in resources to deal with, constraints that will often be of (near) natural kinds ("time", cognitive capacities, structure of matter, sources of fossil energy, other "competitors" etc.).

If accepting the idea that man needs means in order to adapt himself to the environment, then we had to answer the question of the origin of these means. Since all of them are not spontaneously and naturally emerging, the problem becomes the one of the deliberate conception of such artificial means, called *artifacts*.

Since «*artificial things* (artifacts) *are synthesized (though not always or usually with full forethought) by man (...)* (they) *can be characterized in terms of functions, goals, adaptation (...)*» (Simon 1969,1981), so *they can't be understood only in terms of description but also and fundamentally in terms of logic of design*.

In this sense the problem of economic decision has to be radically extended from to the one of selection to the much more general one which is to study the general stable and observable processes inherent to the design of solutions to problems. If we want to understand why these problems emerge and not other ones, we need to refer to the conflictual projects individuals or social groups give to themselves - or are urged to by the environment. The solutions to these problems will be teleologically constructed over time by the oriented actions (functions) generated by artifacts purposefully designed in this sense.

H.A Simon's great efforts along his reflexion and observations to integral and to assimilate the *decision-making processes* (1947, 1977, 1982) with *the problem setting and solving processes* (1972, 1979), with the *design processes* as *adaptation processes* (1969-81, 1982), under *the general Symbols systems theory* (known also as the *Information Processing systems theory*), has to be understood in this sense. These theories can be integrated under the "*General*"

Intelligent Action Principle" proposed by J-L Le Moigne to emphasize the point that these processes can not be reduced to the analytical economic model of choice, since it «ignores the intelligence, the imagination, the thoughtful ruse though so spontaneously put into practice ... peculiarly in situations perceived as complex. Fitting correctly to a Least Action Principle considered as universal and natural, it does not permit to account for behaviors referring to an Intelligent Action Principle, characterizing most of complex systems» (J-L Le Moigne 1990).

Paradoxically, economists have given very few attention in imagining and designing models which permits to describe this essential human activity which is the one of teleologically designing and managing artifacts (organizations, legislations, regulating rules, etc. which can also be immaterial as scientific models, computer programs, immaterial assets, ...) in order to workout projects "from", "for" and "within" complex environments. This is quite surprising when we consider that the period opening by the end of World War II, will be the one of the birth and development the *New Sciences*: Computer and Artificial Intelligence sciences, Information science, Decision science, Communication science, *all sciences of the artificial* which objects are easily intelligible only under teleological assumptions.

One reason to explain the economist's lack of attention to these developments is probably the difficulty to *move from positivist epistemologies and logics to what are called constructivist epistemologies* (see for example P. Watzlawick (1981-85), J. Piaget (1970), J-L Le Moigne (1990)). As Simon (1969-81) stated: «*The natural sciences are concerned with how things are. Ordinary systems of logic - the standard propositional and predicate calculi, say - serve these sciences well. Since the concern of standard logic is with declarative statements, it is well suited for assertions about the world and for inferences from those assertions.*

Design, on the other hand, is concerned with how things ought to be, with devising artifacts to attain goal. We might question whether the forms of reasoning that are appropriate to natural science are suitable for design. One might well suppose that the introduction of the verb "should" may require additional rules of inference, or modification of the rules already imbedded in declarative logic». (p 114)

The fundamental assertions of the constructivist epistemologies are summed up by J-L Le Moigne related to the assumptions of the *Positivist epistemologies*; they tends to assume 1) the ontology or 'natural essence' of "things", 2) some possible objectivity of the description of these things, 3) that elementary non-evolving laws are governing these things, 4) the natural superiority of disjunctive logics as a mean to decide about the truth of some assertion.

On the other side, a *Constructivist epistemology* emphasize the idea that these assumptions are not exclusive to decide of the scientific level of knowledge and that they don't fit with all the phenomena one could study, for example socio-economic problems. A constructivist will suggest the following assumptions respectively to the one stated ahead: 1) we know of the world what we have experienced of it, 2) our representations of the world are tied with what we need to see in order to attain some goals, 3) our representations don't describe the reality of things but our intentional conscient interaction with these things, 4) there are many ways (non only Mathematics but also Rhetoric's) to describe things and reason about them in some evaluable ways.

In this perspective, E. von Glasersfeld (1981) will say that «*(...) constructivism (...) breaks with convention (the one of objectivity) and develops a theory of knowledge in which knowledge does not reflect an "objective" ontological reality, but exclusively an ordering and organization of a world constituted by our experience. The radical constructivist has relinquished "metaphysical realism" once and for all, and finds himself in full agreement with Piaget, who says: "Intelligence organizes the world by organizing itself"»*

Simon would probably add a sentence to Piaget's one quoted by E von Glasersfeld and "*by constructing artifacts both material and symbolic*". Indeed, this organization of the world, on a cognitive level, is given substance in the environment by the materialization of all the sorts of artifacts, organizations and institutions that stabilizes the environment, thus both reducing uncertainty since they rule in some ways the possible behaviors in the environment and offering rather stable objects of knowledge through experiencing, simulation, measures, etc.

Teleological inventiveness, possibilities and the engineering of economic policies

We need to precise now what we meant when we talked about "*the engineering process*". What we call the *Engineering process* is the general model through which some purposeful action can be understood and modeled as the *process* along which: something is *designed, implemented* (built), *managed*, and *evaluated* in order to reach some ends (ends which can be modified at some time in its description), the evaluation processes leading sometimes to a re-design process, followed by implementation,...

This model is somewhat general to describe the behavior of any complex system (Le Moigne 1990), if it is assumed non-erratic, and peculiarly the human decision making process (Simon 1960).

The important point in criticizing positivist attitude to study and solve complex socio-economic problems is in definitely *breaking with the idea of some natural and unique Model*, towards which we (should) tend. If one wants to take a stand this way, he needs the assumption that this Model can be guessed through observation (scientific for example) or that it will emerge spontaneously by the help of some "invisible hand(s)", and that there is a single way to get "there". Unfortunately the concept of equilibrium for example, needs this assumption in order to have some validity and relevancy. Talking about equilibrium implies a model and therefore criteria's in order to decide if we are effectively under equilibrium or tending toward some equilibrium.

The very perverse secondary effect of such a belief is that it prevents us from thinking to and, thus designing, alternatives. Designing alternatives means enlarging the spectrum of possibilities: where a positivist will try to count out the sets of potential states of a system with a joint probability distribution of occurrence (actualization), a constructivist will be much more worried by the possible ways of looking at a phenomena, in order to imagine sometimes unknown but plausible evolutions that could characterize it in the future. In the fields of human action, the problem is to break from a *predictive attitude* (what we know about the past and present states and behaviors will help us anticipate what they will be in the future) - which leads to some repetition of "the same" - to work out a *constructive attitude*: what could or should we do or try to do if we want "something" or someone to have some behaviors it (he) did not necessarily generate (even if there is the need for strategies (and bets) to attain unknown or unheard of goals).

This is what Economic science should give itself more as a project. *Not this much producing a unique explanatory theory but possible theories of economic systems*; as said F. Hayek (1973): "*A fruitful social science must be widely a study of what doesn't exist: a construction of hypothetical models, for worlds which could be possible*".

There is a need to understand that the future world will much look like what we will do of it. The world we live in is more and more the world we build and destroy days after days. We mean that there is no reason to admit that a free spontaneously emerging order (left free to the hope that it will lead to a random but happy final result) has an intrinsically superiority as compared to conscious development.

There is here some conviction to gain back that problems mankind faces can be managed and that they are in no ways the result of a blind fate, or some god's will. We need much more to *develop means and knowledge in diagnosing and evaluating the interacting consequences of processes together on the local level and on the global level* and on both short and very long periods of time. To do so we should start first not to put ourselves in cognitive attitudes that prevents us from thinking on a theoretical or practical level; as regards to human complex problems we think that positivist economics (including Marxian ones) and peculiarly neo-classical ones, did.

Of course intentional development does not mean that everything will be controllable and subject to planning: that would be *wishful thinking*. Of course it doesn't mean either that one should intend to make the bliss of men against their will, for example because they are not supposed to be aware of what should be good for them. Since there are no philosophical, scientific nor ethical evidence that suggests it, and since historical evidences have shown that it is very difficult on long periods (ex: the failure of all totalitarists systems), we need to understand that *we are the simultaneous architects of the world we are living in*. **But** to gain this conscience, there should be given to people the possibility to experiment - under conditions of responsibility about the consequences of their acts - as much personal and social projects as possible. Consequently, this suggests to provide *means* (education, assistance, time, environments, etc.) *to evaluate such actions along multiple criteria* (such as defined obligations and rights) *defined by collective deliberation*.

This is precisely the project we propose for **socio-economics** defined as a *new fundamental engineering science, its project being the study of the sustainable complex social organizations and projects as "evolving artifacts"*. Since some strong materials exist already, we will now try to precise what we put behind the expression "designing evolving sustainable artifacts".

DESIGNING EVOLVING SUSTAINABLE ARTIFACTS

Saying that design is a teleological behavior and that artifacts are the result of such behaviors is not sufficient to help us drive projects. Since we have argued that such behaviors are subject to scientific investigation, we shall now try to describe what stable sub-processes are involved in the complex process of designing sustainable evolving organizations.

We shall here discuss what H.A Simon has denoted by *«Social Planning, Designing the evolving artifact»* (1969-1981, chapter 6), which problematics we shall precise, is the one of intervening in self-organizing environments.

Designing social artifacts

If we crone to talk about the "engineering of something", it's to describe the case in which a non-satisficing situation individuals (or groups) faces will push him (them) to act on it in some ways bettering it. If this individual is responsible of this situation in the sense that his actions partially influenced it, he may try to change it by acting differently.

a) From the project to the representation ... back to the project

The first point in the process is the one of evaluating why and in reference to what, the situation is jugged non-satisfactory. We should say that "everything goes" when the environment and ourselves look like we expected as regards to plans we had or actually have. The reference is here the one of the expected future (the

project) which is somehow generally, the idea of what we would like us and the world to be at some time (present or future). The more "distance" between what we see and what we would like, the more unsatisfied we are. We act in order to reduce this "distance".

Here the *teleology hypothesis* we made is fundamental: what we intend to be or what we would like to see in the future defines what aspects of the present world will seem important for us: for example the levers we will identify as potential means of transforming-actions. If two people have the same project (different projects), they may agree (resp. disagree) to some extent with what is important or not. This is *what will make the "design problem" a representation problem* (of a problem!), the representation problem itself becoming the "organization problem" when will think and decide about the means and ways we should use to solve the project-problem.

This of course will be of considerable importance to decide up to which extent are scarce the resources needed to solve the problem (here too scarcity is not objective). Where the 'homo-æconomicus' chooses with no cognitive constraints but is affected by information's scarcity, Simon's problem solvers face peculiar constraints: bounded computational and attention-focalization capabilities.

One of the problems that face traditional economic modeling methods is that they don't know how to deal with qualitative aspects of problems without having to find immediate transitory quantified indicators in order to operate marginal cost-benefits analysis. It is now well known that these methods are not applicable to any problem and that the precision of their evaluations are luxurious since the complex (ill-structured) problems they try to deal with are not open to precise analytical modeling (thus predictions).

For reasonable, satisficing decisions and planning, "upper and lower bounds" are useful enough since precise data are interesting only if the phenomena regarded are stable enough. Since socio-economic problems are generally not so stable they will be best modeled through *dynamic systems* methodologies; but this kind of models are generally sensitive to initial conditions so that simulation through these models will inevitably give rather large output spectrums for "close" initial data as inputs.

Taking the example of the Club of Rome report as an example of the elusive potential of predicting methods, Simon emphasizes on the fact that we need much more *alternative scenarii* which we could evaluate both «(...) *their sensitivity to errors in the theory and data*». The point here is not much one of precision than one of evaluating plausible results in the future of our actions today.

Moreover most human systems are able to adapt themselves through *retrospective feedback adjustment, which* enables these systems to gain some stability. For this reason, one should not take too seriously inaccurate predictive data if the system can be considered to have such mechanisms.

When asking, "*Who is the client?*" as regard to social planning, Simon sets probably a fundamental problem related to the initial one of representation. We said that in a constructivist referential, the objectivity of the world was only a question of how far the projects, the environments, the sensitivity were common between the people looking at the situation; this fundamental contingency is at the core of the problem set by the "*Professional-Client Relations*". Since there is little chance that two people have the same experience of the world and that their projects perfectly correspond, the goals and process through which they will plan and organize their action will be in some degree conflicting ones... even if they intend to cooperate! The fact that people's actions depend on their own interest was well exposed by the traditional paradigm (it's even one of its fundamental but single-minded assumption); what is somewhat surprising is

that even if they are well-meaning towards their "environment", persons will tend to anticipate and evaluate others' behavior through their own models and criteria.

If some cooperation is to be operated there is a need for some kind of expliciting of the actors "weltanschauung" and design goals in order that the individuals' understanding won't be too different. This is the fundamental condition of success if some coordination is needed in order to work out a solution to the collective problem. Of course the problem remains that in a coordination process one of the actors may try to control his "partners".

The problem related to the one of conflicting projects and goals will be the one of conflicting cognitive representations of the world. The process supporting the collective problem-setting and problem-solving procedures will be to make the initial representation evolve until there will be some kind of relative agreement (convention) - through deliberation and coordination - in the problem's engineering along the time.

We will see that this Professional-Client Relation takes a peculiar form when the client here is the society as a whole. The difficulty of this relation also characterizes the complexity of socio-economic systems and the difficulty to manage the engineering of policies "for" and "in" such systems. Since the actors are assumed to be intelligent (i.e.: adapting, deliberating, judging, able to design strategies and counter-strategies) there is much to bet that a project or an artifact will tend to gain *autonomy* (self-government) from the designer's control and initial projects. This autonomy owes nothing to wizardry but can be well understood, if we admit the possibility for the actors in the environment to act on this artifact in order to manage its behavior in a sense favorable to their projects.

b) Intervening in self-organizing systems

If ever one is able to give himself projects and make them evolve according to the environment's perceived transformations, he (it) has self-organizing capabilities (for the definition and study of self-organizing and auto-poietic social systems, see Zeleny 1984).

Says Simon, a representation of social planning can be given by «(...) a game between the planners and those whose behavior they seek to influence»; since these effects are well-known from economists (and peculiarly from the Rational Expectation School), there is a need to generalize such *design heuristic routines* whenever one has to deal with socially organized problem solving and planning.

Intelligence and decision-making autonomy, with its imperfections and achievements, is the fundamental socio-economic complexity generator. We shall remember that social (and biological) systems are perceived complex (i.e.: all their behaviors are not predictable) «(...) because they are at one and the same time a-centric (this is to say functioning anarchically by spontaneous interactions), poly-centric (they have multiple control centers or organizations) and centric (they dispose at the same time of a decision center). Thus, our historical contemporary societies self-organize at one and the same time starting from a command-decision center (State, government), from many organization centers (provincial, municipal authorities, firms, political parties, etc.) and also from the spontaneous interactions between groups and individuals» (Morin 1991).

On an *epistemological level*, we can emphasize that economists have always treated these interacting levels (entangled hierarchies) separately and by considering one of these levels as hierarchically dominating the others. We can distinguish three main point of view:

-Methodological individualism which considers that because of the complexity of social

systems, the "order" must be the result of spontaneous decentralized selection processes of both the values and the adapted individuals; the global system is thus emerging «(...) *from human action but not human design*» (Hayek 1953); the main concept assignable to this paradigm is HAPHAZARDITY.

-*Methodological holism* which considers that the fundamental explanation of phenomena is to be found by the action of the superstructure over the parts of the systems (the parts behaviors are dictated by the "totalizing system"; on a practical level the parts are to be acted upon, and even constrained to obtain some peculiar priority effects or characteristics on the global level; the main concept assignable to this paradigm is GLOBAL NECESSITY.

-*Methodological interactionism* which owes essentially to the development of systems sciences, argues that "the emerging system is both more and less than the sum of its elementary parts" arguing this consideration with the concept of *recursive processes*. *Recursive processes* describe "the processes (or environments) which produce effects (or the sub-processes) that produce in return the processes themselves". The very important general result of interactions, called "*system-effect*" is that the whole both inhibits and makes emerge behaviors at the level of the part that would not exist if the same parts were isolated from "neighbors". The main concept assignable to this paradigm is EVOLUTIONARY CO-ADAPTATION.

What Socio-Economies intend to do is to consider jointly these three levels in order that both on the theoretical and practical levels none of them should be neglected. If the complexity of human systems is assignable to individual's autonomy, *this autonomy is contingent*, since the system-effect generates constraints. *This means that the problem of the "micro-economic foundations of macro-economies" is incorrectly set since this system-effect can't be dealt with analytical modeling.*

For this reason *decision-making is a problem solving process interacting with interacting constraints (generating complexity)*. This is the reason why it can't be modeled by the optimization process says Morin (1991): «*Complexity calls for strategy*». The strategies themselves, which are supported by *procedural interactive forms of rationality* (Simon) for adaptation to contingent environments.

c) The complex management of time and attention

Talking about procedural forms of rationality implies to emphasize the temporal dimension of human behaviors and actions. The planning processes are all action planning according to what we think the environment and ourselves will be in the future. Of course the complexity of the environment implies by definition imperfect anticipations which themselves reveal our cognitive limitations. This is the reason why the more a situation has to be considered in a long term, the less we can give it some attention. Thus «*our myopia is not adaptive, but symptomatic of the limits of our adaptability*» and this is the reason why we have some kind of preference for the present: we are uneasy in thinking coherently about "worlds" far in the future and space and thus in evaluating the consequences of our actions since they will be rather diffused than specified.

The new attention given to ecological problems has helped to modify our perception and representations of time. The main "discovery" we made is our world's limited dimensions (and resources), which are not concealable with the irreversible consequences of many actions and evolutions. The result of this sudden awareness is the one of a considerable extension of our temporal horizons. According to Simon, it seems there is «(...) *a genuine downward shift in the social interest rate we apply to*

discount events that are remote in time and space», and fundamentally «(...) *a genuine shift in our orientation to time* (...)».

This new orientation is of considerable importance as regards to the problem of sustainability we shall discuss later.

If organization and artifacts are designed in order to solve problems, there will emerge the problem of deciding what sub-problems are to be dealt and in which sequence: all the problems can not be dealt at the same time and a peculiar problem can generally be solved only through a few alternative scenarios. The sequence (the plan) will much be affected by considerations of emergency, of critical importance as regards to the problem solving process as a whole, in the present but also in the future (the collective potential to solve other problems in the future). The limits of focusing attention are one of the main factors determining bounded rationality.

The capacity of a system to maintain some level of focused attention is a necessary condition for solving process, but also for the observation of the environment (in order for the system to detect evolutions that might be important for it) and the learning processes.

The number of iterations of the "engineerial loop" a system is able to manage over a given period of time, characterizes its ability to focus its attention on self-observing its behavior, the context, and consciously evaluate the consequences (for example the good or bad use of resources) *and the reasons justifying it, in order to change its initial orientations for the next time period if necessary*. We will see that the amount of time necessary for a system to describe this iteration is essential for its sustainability.

In social systems the *iteration's rhythm of this cycle* is more or less fast according to the dimensions of the problem considered. This is why the political terms are various and depending on the problem's type, the level (local, national, etc.) and the peculiar functions considered (executive, legislative, justice, etc.). The same problem influences the "production period" of mass media, periodicals (publications), etc.

If ever individuals have problems in focusing their attention, the problem is much more complex when we talk about large social groups (Simon 1983) when problems have to be managed on big scales, under the limited control of a central decision system.

The hierarchy of the values will be of fundamental importance in the way global attention resources will be used. This is the reason why *there is some need for collective deliberation and public knowledge about these "exposed values"*, such as the model of what progress should or could be. On this collective level, the main function of mass-medias, government information agencies, lobbying groups, for example, is to help this process; for this reason they will be closely looked after and influenced by the political sub-systems.

Designing social evolving artifacts: planning without final goals: Going beyond the initial paradox

Talking about *design without final goals* seems surprising since we are used to evaluate rationality by mean-ends analysis and by the effectiveness of action according to previously well-defined substantive goals.

Along the global engineerial loop (or the main decision-making-process) which brings the designer from his initial plan and intents to some results (definitive or temporary) are requested *multiple engineerial sub-loops that tend to gain some relative autonomy from the global process*. The consequence - that can be

enlightened by the complexity (unpredictability) of the environment - is that there will be some evolutions both in the ends and in the criteria for decision along the process. Thus the final or actual state of the system is never just the same as the one formally searched or expected. This is the reason why Simon proposed to evaluate such general phenomena through **procedural rationality** to describe the situations in which the process is finally more important than the "substantive" result (for the distinction between substantive and procedural rationality, see Simon 1976, for example).

As individuals, we generally plan in order to prepare somehow a future we don't really know what will look like. The only thing we are sure is that *we must need to adapt to it*. In that sense, most of our present efforts (generally called "investments") are oriented in **gaining means and abilities of deciding and acting in the future**. Since we have no analytical ability to characterize precisely what "will be", *such reasonable decisions are rational only on a procedural point of view*.

The results of our action will only be to establish **starting points for the next iteration of the engineering loop**. Thus, says Simon «*A paradoxical, but perhaps realistic, view of design goals is that their function is to motivate activity which in turn will generate new goals (...) Making complex design that are implemented during a long period of time and continually modified in the course of implementation no much in common with painting in oil. In oil painting every new spot of pigment laid on the canvas creates some kind of pattern that provides a continuing source of new ideas to the painter. The painting process of cyclical interaction between painter and canvas in which current goals lead to new applications of paint, while the gradually changing pattern suggests new goals*».

For once, what is true on an individual level is transposable on the collective level. Any designer of a social-aimed artifact will have to face the procedural dimension of the autonomization process it will be the subject. **This artifact has to become in some extent (and will be) the starting point for the environments actors projects**. To illustrate the following process, Simon gives the following example: «*(...) when thirty years ago an extensive renewal program was begun in the city of Pittsburgh, a principal goal of the program was to rebuild the center of the city, the so-called Golden Triangle. Architects have had much to say, favorable and unfavorable, about the esthetic qualities of the plans that were carried out. But such evaluations are largely beside the point. The main consequence of the initial step of redevelopment was to demonstrate the possibility of creating an attractive and functional central city on this site, a demonstration that was followed by many subsequent construction activities that had change the whole face of the city and the attitudes of its inhabitants. It is also beside the point to ask whether the later stages of the development were consistent with the initial one - whether the original design was realized. Each step of implementation created a new situation; and the new situation provided a starting point for fresh design activity*».

Fields of planning without final goals

There are many types of problems that depend of **design without final goals processes**. They have the common peculiarity of having no precise ending criteria since are faced:

-Ill-structured problems.

-Problems for which there are no solutions known at the starting point of the process (for example, the anticipation in France of the strengthening problem set by nuclear radioactive waste: we know the problem and develop endeavors for solving it - especially in the field of R&D, but we have little knowledge of what practicable solution is going to be designed). The only thing *we hope is that the solution is "somewhere" in the search process*.

-Problems with no terminal ending models, because they are recurrent and that the solutions can be improved or simply changed for different ones (for reasons of technical developments for example).

On a more general level, and as an argument against the idea of some *one best way* calculable by means of optimization techniques, *the general collective "ends", or "values" have many alternative satisfaction modalities*. For example if we admit that western countries have similar values in terms of liberty, education, human rights, etc. we can see that *the general processes and organizations devoted to these values follow different modalities*, some nations giving specific priority or superiority to State control (France or Italy) when other rely more on private enterprise under strict regulation and market competition (USA).

Planning without final goals suggests endeavors to study and *design heuristics* involved in such processes since they may provide as many design and planning principles as heuristics identified and simulated (as an example of such principles see Geanakoplos & Gray 1991).

Organizing finalizing environments

Simon's provocative thesis is intelligible if we consider that preparing the conditions for *«the next generation of decision makers»* amounts to say that the global and local environments have to be organized in order to supply material and cognitive possibilities to them.

This in itself is a very complex design problem when different groups within society have conflicting values and projects with limited resources. This problem of the values is somewhat more strictly devoted to *politics*, understood as the study and practice of the finalization process in a system.

What is sure is that when some deliberation has led to the choice of main finalities for the socio-economic system, the procedures to be managed can be understood as some organizing processes (education systems, infrastructures, legislation, etc.) of the environment, organization which will support other forms of organized activities (private or public, individual or collective, profit or non-profit oriented). In this sense, *Socio-Economies is the science of finalizing-finalization processes*, most organizations having for single general purpose the one of finalizing individuals.

System's sustainability and sustainability criteria

The intrinsic superiority of one of the three main methodologies can't be decided on an ontological level. The discussion may somewhat be organized around the criteria of the *sustainability* of a system. This problem was at the core of the **Brundtland Report** (*«Our common future»*) presented in March 1987 and was defined by the following statement: *«The sustainable development would satisfy present needs without compromising the capacity of future generations to satisfy theirs»*.

The problem of sustainability is generally reduced to the one of survival. This simplification is of little help since there is no possible "life" without the transformation, the destruction or the "death" of something. This problem is at the core of the trophic chains observed in ecological systems.

Since this process takes place in an environment those constraints this "survival", we have to integrate the relation between the system and its environments.

As a temporary starting point and as a first approximation for our discussion, we shall define *sustainability of a system as being the functional capacity of a system to self-organize itself and self-adapt his interactions with the environment (such as the transformation the*

system operates on it) in order to never reach or be forced in some irreversible situation.

We can discuss the position of the three main paradigms for socio-economic problems.

1) *Methodological individualism* is much preoccupied by the rationality of individual behavior, saying that the emerging effects of all individual actions are unpredictable; as a consequence they should not be considered since the selection and competition processes all under constraints will lead to the best adapted systems. If the complexity of social systems is well considered there are no evidence that:

- The selection process, leaved to pure randomness, will have enough time to complete and,
- That the environment won't be totally and irreversibly damaged by the emerging effects of competition.

2) *Methodological holism* considers that a social predetermined system or emergence can be built through the dominant coordination of a central decision center. "Ashby's requested variety principle" has made the formal proof that the piloting system assumed in that case must have a greater complexity than the piloted system in order to undertake such coordination. The failure of the large centrally planned economies in Eastern Europe has proven this requirement to be quite impossible to manage except by reducing the variety of the piloted system. They have proven not to be sustainable.

Methodological interactionism emphasizes the fact that the system builds itself by recursive interactions. This is to say that the individuals and their environments *are jointly* co-building and co-organizing themselves in some inseparable ways.

At this point we have to deal with the *complex concept of autonomy*. The problem is remarkably set by Morin (1991): «(...) *understanding autonomy sets a complexity problem. The autonomy wasn't imaginable in the physical and the biological world since science only talked about determinisms external to beings. The concept of autonomy can be imaginable starting from a theory of systems both open and enclosed; a system that works needs energy, which it finds in his environment. From that time onwards, autonomy builds itself upon the dependence towards the environment and the concept of autonomy becomes a complementary concept to the one of dependence, though it is also antagonism to it. In other respects, an autonomous open system must at the same time be enclosed, in order to preserve its individuality and originality. (...) In the world of simple things, it is required "that a door must be open or closed", but in the complex universe, an autonomous system must be at the same time open and enclosed. One must be dependent to be autonomous*».

1) From this conceptualization of autonomy much can be inferred as regards to sustainability criteria. If one is to be autonomous, which is a necessary condition to run projects, he has to deal with the manner and the extent he his dependent to the environment. If the first is dependent from the second, there is a necessary inter-dependence. The fact that this is pleasant or not is not the problem: the mutual dependence is un-avoidable and consubstantial: in some manner *the environment becomes the system itself*.

Thus, the first (meta-) criterion is the one of a dialectical autonomy 'solidarity: a system has to develop some solidarity with the environment; solidarity is not workable without autonomy.

2) The second point is that the more diverse is the environment, the more diverse may be the ways of being autonomous, since the possible alternatives grow with the number of potential combinations

of autonomous but "joinable" systems (that can become future sub-systems). Thus, the global variety of the environment has to be preserved. But this is not sufficient: on a practical level, this means that when an artifact is to be sustainably designed it requires to be "joinable" with order "beings" in the environment; in other words we mean that it must be "gradable" (appropriable) by the environment.

Thus, the second sustainability criterion is the one of the *system's environmental suitability*

3) Since adaptation and autonomy are much linked to the ability of a given system to generate a behavior relevant for the environmental evolving requirements, the more various the behaviors a system is able to generate, the more sustainable it will be.

Thus, the third sustainability criterion is the one of *self-complexification* or *variety maximization*.

For social individuals and organizations, this problem was set the following way by H.A Simon: «*How do we want to leave the world for the next generation? What are the good initial conditions for them? One desideratum would be a world offering as many alternatives as possible to future decision makers (...)*»; and more radically by H. Von Foerster: «*Always act in a manner that increases the number of possible choices*».

4) As a result of self-complexification or increased variety the system's intervention in the environment will contribute to complexity this environment that in return should complexity the considered system that, etc.

Thus, the fourth principle will be the one of the system's capacity to enter a variety co-generating process: we shall call it *co-complexification capability*.

5) From this principle can be inferred another one, which will be the ability of such a system to move for a possible behavior (or program or routine) to another one. This capacity is the one of the actualization of potential behaviors, which is much related to the speed in this process.

Thus, the fifth principle will be the one of the *operational re-configuration speed* of the system.

6) The forth and fifth principles taken together with the problem of (temporal) irreversibility allows to propose another sustainability criteria which will be the one of the operational re configuration continuum quality. Can this configuration be smooth, continuous or does it require discrete, step-wise evolutions?

After a system has re-organized itself in order to move from behavior "A" to "B", is it still possible for the system to move back from "B" to "A"?

Thus, this criterion of very importance for design and planning will be called *the system's general plasticity* criteria.

This principle is expressed this way by Simon -s the problem of «*(...) avoiding irreversible commitments that (the next generation of decision makers) cannot undo*».

Since a system's plasticity is never absolute, a careful attention should be focused on trying to identify

the possible "*bifurcation points*" (I. Prigogine) that may affect the evolution of the system's behavior in some un-manageable ways.

7) J. Pitrat (1991) stated that a system could be considered as "intelligent" (thus self-adaptable) only if it has some capability to differentiate himself from the environment, which means that he has some self-observing capabilities to observe his behaviors (in order to be able to evaluate and modify them). Thus, this requirement may be stated to be the *system's own behaviors self-observation capabilities*.

All these heuristics can be used both as principles for the design of some artifacts or intervention process in the environment and as criteria to evaluate the rationality of some decisions as regards to the transformations it operated in the environment.

We are now able to propose **THE GENERAL SUSTAINABILITY PRINCIPLE:**

A system will be sustainable along a definite period of time if it is able to self-produce, preserve and increase its autonomy and complexity as related to its general plasticity along that period, while solidarity and jointly organizing its complexifying interactions with an environment assumed to be co-dependent. These entangled behaviors require the system's ability to general self-observation functions.

We can easily understand that such a complex (multi-dimensional) problem has no simple (mono-criterial) solution and constitute in itself a research program.

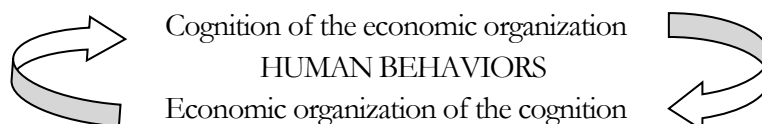
CONCLUSION

The crucial point we would like to emphasize here is that whatever the future world will be, we will have an essential responsibility about it. Scientific knowledge endeavors has helped to break with the idea that some "Grand Horloger" was everywhere and that whatever happened, it was a matter of his "saké".

Within scientific fields we are now able to break from the deep insight positivist belief that the world is what it is as a consequence of some eternal laws of human behavior no one could get round. We gain days after days a better understanding of human intelligence with its unpredictable ruse and achievements but also with its boundaries and weaknesses.

The world, since it has become more and more artificial, has increased in stability as regards to natural hazards, even if the growing human power needs some specific attention and adapted behaviors and artifacts.

We are now able to understand and scientifically argue that there is a need for a better understanding of what could be socio-Economies as a problem of *shared collective simultaneous engineering*; this understanding of the stable (cognitive) processes involved will lead to the development of Socio-Economies as some fundamental new engineering science studying, modeling and designing sustainable evolving artifacts. But going ahead needs to enter the following recursive loop, which is essentially of individual and collective cognitive concerns:



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ÉVOLUTION, RATIONALITÉ ET TÉLÉOLOGIE

L'Économique entre énergétique et pragmatique

Par Jean-Louis LE MOIGNE (1997)*

Résumé

Pour se constituer, il y a deux siècles, puis pour se développer, l'Économique n'a longtemps trouvé de supports (langage, métaphores, règles et principes d'interprétation) que dans le Paradigme Énergétique que nourrissait la physique, puis de la physico-chimie. Ainsi s'est constituée une Économique Énergétique (aujourd'hui néo-classique) qui a pu bénéficier du crédit scientifique de l'énergétique. Les nouveaux développements des théories de l'évolution au sein de la biologie, se détachant de leurs références énergétiques (thermodynamique), ont constitué progressivement un référentiel alternatif au sein duquel de nouveaux paradigmes de l'Économique commencent à s'affirmer, proposant des schèmes modélisateurs et des modes d'interprétation (rationalité dialectique et téléologique) différents de ceux de l'économique énergétique, mais a priori épistémologiquement bien formés et ainsi scientifiquement recevables. Cette ouverture du champ paradigmatique de l'Économique conduit à reconnaître désormais la progressive émergence d'une "économique pragmatique", qui ne s'enferme plus dans les paradigmes de l'énergétique ou de l'évolution biologique, et qui bénéficie de l'expérience modélisatrice et cognitive des sciences de l'homme et de la société contribuant au "tournant de la pragmatique" dans l'épistémologie contemporaine.

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L'Économique s'est longtemps perçue comme l'étude de l'allocation raisonnée par les sociétés humaines (et par les "agents" qui les composaient), de ressources matérielles et énergétiques naturelles, ressources dont l'insuffisante disponibilité pouvait être au moins partiellement compensée par le jeu réfléchi des multiples technologies artificielles de transformation et de distribution de matière et d'énergie : projet qui l'incitait à emprunter dès sa naissance, puis tout au long du XIXe siècle, le langage et les schémas de description et d'interprétation de la mécanique puis de l'énergétique, lorsque celle-ci se constitua dans son ambitieux programme unificateur de la cinématique et de la thermodynamique¹ ; programme annoncé dès 1824 par Sadi Carnot publiant ses "*réflexions sur la puissance motrice du feu et sur les machines propres à développer cette puissance*", reliant la chaleur, d'origine matérielle, à la "puissance motrice" ou énergie, et qui allait se développer prodigieusement en un demi-siècle, transformant même parfois la "*théorie énergétique*" en une "*doctrine de l'énergétique*" que proclame Ostwald en 1908 : "*C'est dans l'énergie que s'incarne le réel ; elle est le réel en ce qu'elle est ce qui agit... On n'a jamais trouvé d'incarnation aussi vivante du savoir humain. On ne saurait citer de phénomènes qui ne puissent y être rattachés*"².

L'Économique se forme dans le langage de l'énergétique

On comprend que l'Économique se soit aisément installée dans le langage et dans les formalismes de cette énergétique, ce qui lui permettait par surcroît de revendiquer ainsi le statut de

* Cet article a été publié avec quelques modifications mineures dans *Économie Appliquée*, ISMEA, Tome I, 1997, n°3, p. 53-69.

¹ L'équivalence de l'énergie de mouvement et de la chaleur est reconnue vers 1850 avec la formulation du "1^{er} principe" de conservation quantitative de l'énergie, Joule, 1843 et celle du "2^{ème} principe" de dégradation qualitative de l'énergie, Thomson et Clausius, 1850).

² F. Hallwachs présente la "doctrine" énergétique d'Ostwald (dont l'ouvrage "*L'énergie*" fut traduit en français en 1910) dans une étude publiée par les "*Cahiers de la Fondation Archives Jean Piaget*", n° 4, Genève, Av. 1983, p. 217-240.

"science positive" qu'Auguste Comte lui avait refusé en établissant le "*tableau synoptique des disciplines scientifiques*" qui constitue aujourd'hui encore le modèle de base de l'organisation des académies. La plupart des concepts par lesquels la science économique s'expose ne sont-ils pas empruntés ou directement calqués sur ceux que l'énergétique avait précédemment dégagés ? Équilibre et conservation, travail et rendement, capital et potentiel, flux et stocks, amortissement et déperdition, effet multiplicateur et catalyse,... la liste est longue des "facteurs" que l'on retrouve sans surprise "nomadisant (avec les Saint-Simoniens) de l'Énergétique à l'Économique".

La célèbre et féconde distinction introduite en énergétique par Rankine entre les *facteurs d'extensité* (quantités, volumes,...) additifs, et les *facteurs d'intensité* (températures, affinités,...), non additifs, va s'avérer vite adéquate pour l'Économique, qui intégrera prix ou utilité comme facteur d'intensité (le "prix" d'un bien étant en quelque sorte l'équivalent de la "température" d'équilibre lors des échanges entre offre et demande).

La capacité de l'Énergétique à intégrer dans une même construction théorique la cinématique (ou la mécanique classique : étude du mouvement dans l'espace en fonction du temps) et la dynamique (étude des modifications des formes en fonction du temps : transformation ou morphogenèse) lui permettra, au moins dans un premier temps, de s'accommoder, sinon de s'approprier les développements des théories de l'évolution qui vont se déployer en parallèle à partir de 1850 avec la diffusion des œuvres de Darwin et de Spencer ; l'équilibration s'entendant alors comme une adaptation dont les deux modes seront ceux de la variation (ou de la mutation) et de la sélection. Peut-être est-ce cette quasi récupération implicite de l'évolutionnisme naissant par l'énergétique qui inhiba pendant plus d'un demi-siècle l'audience des travaux des premiers économistes se référant à l'évolutionnisme, tels que les premiers "institutionnalistes" : Veblen, Common, ..., qui interprétaient la formation des institutions socio-économiques sur le modèle de celle des niches écologiques ? Il est vrai que le développement concomitant de l'économisme marxiste ne laissait alors que peu d'espace au développement d'une école qui se serait explicitement différenciée d'un paradigme énergétique qui pouvait prétendre rendre compte "normalement" de la dynamique des phénomènes évolutifs (entendus dans leur généralité : productif, politique, économique, financier,...).

Le Principe d'Économie (ou de moindre action), Principe de l'Énergétique générale

L'intérêt manifeste de ce grand paradigme de l'énergétique pour l'économie étant de lui proposer non seulement un langage (ou des catégories de référence), mais surtout une interprétation "rationnelle" (calculable)¹ et causaliste des relations entre ces catégories... et donc de l'"ordre" régnant dans les phénomènes naturels de transformation réciproque de matière et d'énergie (la "*doctrine du substantialisme de l'énergie*" d'Ostwald qui tenait "*l'énergie pour une chose réelle*", ayant vite fait place à la conception de l'énergétique contemporaine, qui voit dans l'énergie une "*relation mathématique constante*" entre des facteurs d'extensité et d'intensité pouvant prendre des formes très diverses).

Et parmi ces lois de l'énergétique, un vieux principe, que Pappus appelait déjà le "*principe d'économie*" ou le "*principe des minima*", qui deviendra au XVIII^e siècle, "*le principe de moindre action*" (Maupertuis), lequel en se généralisant dans sa formulation (Euler, Fermat, Lagrange, Hamilton, Maxwell, ...) va guider la plupart des développements du paradigme² (...et aujourd'hui de la discipline

¹ Que ce soit sur des modes algébriques linéaires, matriciels, ou différentiels ou sur des modes statistiques.

² D'Arcy-Thompson, dans son célèbre "*On Growth of Form*" (1917-1969) a succinctement rappelé cette riche histoire du Principe de Moindre Action, à propos de son application à la formation de l'étonnante géométrie des cellules de cire dans les ruches d'abeilles (p. 108-109 de "l'Abridged Edition" de 1969. L'ouvrage est depuis traduit en français, je crois.

scientifique portant ce nom, laquelle n'apparaît en tant que telle que depuis 1970 environ, sans doute parce qu'il lui fallait au préalable se libérer du lyrisme des doctrines de l'énergétisme du début du siècle !). Ostwald, reprenant G. Helm, proposera une définition générale de ce principe : *"Toute forme d'énergie tend à passer des endroits où elle a une plus grande intensité à des endroits d'une intensité moindre"*.

Ainsi formulé, le Principe de Moindre Action présente un remarquable caractère de généralité : il suffit de proposer quelques facteurs d'extensité qui caractérisent le substrat - ou l'espace de phase - dans lequel le phénomène considéré doit être décrit, et un facteur d'intensité que l'on tiendra pour fondamentalement caractéristique de ce phénomène, évaluable par une fonction de type *"gradient de potentiel"*, et on pourra établir une "théorie énergétique de ce phénomène".

Les multiples formes d'énergies "naturelles" que l'on identifiait au XIXe siècle (électrostatique, électromagnétique, chimique, thermique, hydraulique, quantique, atomique, nucléaire, etc...) pouvaient ainsi être modélisées et théorisées selon un schéma général qui ne niait pas leurs spécificités et leur indépendance relative, et qui permettait cependant de rendre compte de leur capacité à se transformer les unes dans les autres dès que l'on pouvait proposer quelques correspondances entre les facteurs d'extensité et d'intensité caractérisant chacune d'entre elles.

Quel "facteur d'intensité" pour l'Économie Énergétique ? L'utilité subjective espérée.

On comprend que l'Économie ait cherché, presque dès sa formation, à adapter la formulation de ses problématiques au paradigme de l'Énergétique qui dégageait un appareil modélisateur manifestement si puissant. D'autant plus que la plupart des facteurs "extensifs" qu'avait dégagés l'énergétique pionnière, celle de la mécanique classique (ou "rationnelle") et de la thermodynamique (qui allait engendrer la mécanique statistique), étaient précisément ceux qu'elle voulait également considérer : des quantités limitées et mesurables de biens matériels transformables, capitalisables et consommables, et de "production de travail", transformables, transportables et renouvelables. Il ne lui fallait qu'identifier "le facteur d'intensité" lui permettant de caractériser sans ambiguïté sa problématique, de façon à ce que l'on ne la confonde pas avec une autre des théories énergétiques déjà développées par les physiciens et les chimistes. Exercice difficile a priori dès lors que l'on accepte la contrainte du principe de moindre action : ce facteur doit être unique comme doit l'être l'échelle sur laquelle il doit être évalué. On pouvait craindre qu'il soit difficile d'obtenir un consensus sur sa définition, au moins chez les économistes. *"De gustibus est disputandum"* rappelle avec humour H.A. Simon (1983, p. 11) évoquant la formation de ce consensus. Ce fut pourtant, ajoute-t-il, *"une des entreprises intellectuelles les plus impressionnantes de la première moitié du XXe siècle"*. Après la formation de la théorie dite de l'utilité, son raffinement sous la forme de *"la théorie de l'utilité subjective espérée"*, constitue, dans sa forme la plus achevée, la définition fort généralement acceptée aujourd'hui du facteur d'intensité (le "gradient de potentiel" à optimiser sur un substrat également défini et évaluable) caractérisant l'économie entendue à partir de la métaphore énergétique (que l'on appelle couramment *"Économie néo-classique"* pour ne pas révéler trop ostensiblement son hérité énergétique, le préfixe "néo" rendant compte des raffinements apportés progressivement au concept d'utilité - ou de "fonction d'utilité" - des agents et systèmes produisant et échangeant dans un "espace économique descriptible", dont les avènements possibles font l'objet d'une distribution en probabilité présumée connue à chaque instant.

"Quelques éminents théoriciens de l'économie, au premier rang desquels T. Veblen et J. Commons, refusèrent tout ou presque de cette théorie classique", ajouteront H.A. Simon et A. Stedry en 1963¹, *"mais la grande majorité des*

¹ H.A. Simon et A.C. Stedry *"Psychology and Economics"* (1963), repris dans *"Models of Bounded Rationality"*, vol. 2, 1982, p. 319.

économistes théoriciens contemporains peut être considérée comme se référant à cette tradition classique,... ignorant ou sous-estimant ses caractéristiques très spécifiques"... et éloignant ainsi la science économique d'une science empirique !

L'Énergétique, garantie de scientificité de l'Économique?

On ne reprendra pas ici la discussion critique de la théorie de l'utilité subjective espérée considérée comme la fonction de potentiel permettant d'identifier, voire de calculer, la ou les solution(s) (les équilibres) des problèmes que l'Économique, entendue comme une énergétique, se propose de traiter. H.A. Simon en particulier l'a présentée à maintes reprises et en particulier dans *"Reason in Human Affairs"* (1983, p. 12-17). On soulignera seulement que ce n'est pas la théorie énergétique en tant que telle (les "modèles de calcul" dérivés du principe général de moindre action qu'elle développe) qui font l'objet de cette discussion, mais seulement (si j'ose dire) la légitimité épistémologique de son "application" à la description et à l'interprétation des phénomènes économiques. Son élégance formelle (caractérisée en effet par son *"économie cognitive"*) et son apparente pertinence dans le champ des phénomènes physicochimiques, ne suffisent en aucune façon à assurer sa pertinence a priori pour la modélisation des phénomènes économiques. Et, à supposer que l'on parvienne à le montrer, il faudrait identifier une fonction de potentiel (un "facteur d'intensité") beaucoup mieux justifiée que celle de l'utilité subjective espérée, pour établir une économie énergétique épistémologiquement... et pragmatiquement... bien argumentée. Ce qui autorise certes un programme de recherche ouvert à la science économique mais convenons que ce programme est exploré depuis si longtemps et par tant d'économistes que l'on peut être dubitatif sur ses chances de progrès. L'Économique a peut-être tant pressé le "citron" de l'énergétique qu'il ne présente plus "d'utilité espérable"... au moins à court terme.

On comprend pourtant pourquoi tant d'économistes s'y consacrent encore : l'énergétique fait de l'économie énergétique une "science positive" privilégiant ainsi l'exercice exclusif des formes de raisonnement déductif (*"substantif"* dira H.A. Simon, 1976) tenu pour une garantie de scientificité ("la méthode analytique" au sens aristotélicien ou cartésien du terme) puisque l'énergétique physique l'est presque par définition.

L'Économique évolutionniste s'institue en un paradigme alternatif

Mais cette garantie de scientificité assurée par l'énergétique n'est peut-être pas exclusive ? Est-ce parce que les formes modernes des théories de l'évolution (les "néo-darwinismes") présentaient, elles aussi des garanties de respectabilité académique qu'un certain nombre d'économistes, sensibles aux critiques épistémologiques fortes que l'on oppose à l'économie énergétique, ont repris le flambeau du paradigme évolutionniste en Économie ? Flambeau que s'étaient efforcés de saisir T. Veblen ou J. Common, puis, dans des contextes différents J.A. Schumpeter² d'une part et F.A. Hayek³ de l'autre. Ne peut-on en effet autonomiser assez les théories de l'évolution, surtout dans les développements contemporains de la génétique et de l'éco et de la géo-systémique, pour qu'elles puissent se définir indépendamment de l'énergétique ? La dualité entre facteurs d'extensité et d'intensité n'y est peut-être pas significative, et le principe de "survie des plus aptes" n'est peut-être pas réductible à un principe de

¹ N. Rescher *"Cognitive Economy, the Economic Dimension of the Theory of Knowledge"*, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989.

² B. Paulré, dans *"L'analyse évolutionniste du changement technologique. Ses trois paradigmes"* (METIS, 1995), souligne que *"l'évolutionnisme de J. Schumpeter ne doit rien à Darwin"*.

³ La *"théorie évolutionniste hayekienne"* est présentée de façon originale et documentée par J. Birner dans un article à paraître *"Connaissance humaine et institutions sociales, l'idée d'évolution chez Popper et Hayek"*, 1996.

minima, en même temps qu'il n'a peut-être pas la portée déterministe qu'on lui attribuait initialement. L'impressionnant développement des théories en bio-génétique comme en éco-géo-systémique semble ne pas trop s'embarasser des modèles de la thermodynamique (...lesquels voudraient, avec N. Georgescu Roegen (1970), que la physique l'enseignant, il faut croire "*que la taille est indissolublement liée à la qualité... La taille optimale de l'éléphant, juste comme celle d'une installation industrielle, est déterminée par des lois physiques qui concernent des qualités quantifiées...*" que parvenait à "récupérer" l'Économique Énergétique (non sans brio, parfois, les lecteurs de N. Georgescu-Roegen le savent²). Et il semble bien que ces théories évolutionnistes ouvrent à l'Économique la voie d'un autre paradigme qui peut s'avérer lui aussi "garant de scientificité"... au moins aussi reconnue que celui que lui offre le paradigme énergétique. On cite volontiers aujourd'hui l'ouvrage de Nelson et Winter "*An Evolutionary Theory of Economic Change*", paru en 1982, comme la référence symbolisant l'émergence de ce paradigme alternatif en économie : la "nouvelle théorie évolutionniste" substituant le concept de processus (ou de génétique) organisationnel à celui d'équilibre sur lequel s'était établi l'économique énergétique puis à celui de "programme génétique", va en peu de temps prendre une audience scientifique suffisante dans la communauté économique ; sa respectabilité scientifique sinon académique apparaît de mieux en mieux reconnue, parfois au prix de l'ambiguïté de l'intitulé "néo-institutionnaliste" sous lequel se présentent parfois ces travaux : H.A. Simon souligne que "*la nouvelle économie institutionnelle ne remet en général pas en question les hypothèses du noyau de la théorie néo-classique (maximisation de l'utilité...)... à moins que l'on étende ce terme aux chercheurs qui désignent eux-mêmes leurs travaux par des appellations différentes, de «théorie behavioriste» ou de «théorie évolutionniste», auteurs tels que R. Cyert et J. March, S. Winter et R. Nelson respectivement*"³. Il ajoute qu'il "*se range lui-même dans ces derniers groupes*".

Le Nouvel Évolutionnisme propose un nouveau langage à l'Économique

L'intérêt pour notre propos ici est d'examiner la légitimité épistémologique de cette revendication de "*l'économique évolutionniste*"⁴ à un statut scientifique au moins aussi respectable que celui de l'économique énergétique. Examen qui s'avère grandement facilité par la lecture du chapitre qu'H.A. Simon a consacré, en 1983, à la discussion de la rationalité mise en œuvre par les théories de l'évolution, sous un titre significatif "*Rationalité et Téléologie*".

Les théories de l'évolution se déploient sur une hypothèse téléologique (la "*cause finale*" aristotélicienne) qu'ignorait l'hypothèse causaliste linéaire ("*cause efficiente*") du principe des minima de l'énergétique : aucun équilibre final n'est jamais définitivement atteint par le système en évolution, mais à chaque instant, son prochain comportement est caractérisé par la recherche de la survie : recherche qui se développe par la combinaison de deux processus : la "*variation*" qui crée de nouvelles formes, et la "*sélection*" qui préserve les formes qui s'avèrent bien adaptées téléologiquement à leur environnement. Ce qui conduit H.A. Simon à interpréter les nouvelles théories de l'évolution par les théories de "*l'adaptation rationnelle*" : reprenant la thèse de Nelson et Winter (1982) pour illustrer l'application de ces théories à l'étude des phénomènes économiques, il montre que "*le comportement rationnel*" ainsi manifesté par un système évoluant et s'adaptant, par la création et l'utilisation des "gènes" que sont les routines organisationnelles par exemple, s'il conduit à des situations "adaptatives", ne conduit pas

¹ N. Georgescu-Roegen : "*La science économique, ses problèmes et ses difficultés*", traduit de l'anglais, Dunod, 1969, p. 56.

² Et plus encore les tenants d'une "économie de l'environnement" qui, se référant à son autorité, la "réduisent" à une économie strictement énergétique.

³ Préface de H.A. Simon à l'ouvrage de H. Gabriél et J.L. Jacquier "*La théorie moderne de l'entreprise. L'approche institutionnelle*", Economica, 1994.

⁴ Le qualificatif "*évolutionniste*" n'est peut-être pas très heureux ici, mais il semble moins laid que "*évolutionnaire*" ? Peut-être par symétrie avec l'Énergétique, faudrait-il parler de la *génétique*. L'Économique génétique - ou morphogénétique - serait peut-être recevable, mais il ne semble pas encore reçu ?

nécessairement à des situations "optimum" ni même se rapprochant de l'optimum. De quel optimum parlerait-on d'ailleurs puisque la théorie de l'évolution ne définit pas le "facteur d'intensité unique et stable" que ses mécanismes internes ("son programme") viseraient à optimiser ? A chaque "étape", il est bien des modes différents de "survie" possibles, et "*l'évolution est myope*" : comment pourrait-elle différencier un optimum global d'un optimum local ? En outre, la théorie de l'évolution contemporaine n'est pas contrainte par l'hypothèse de "*la compétition*" dans "*une «niche» unique ou dans un système fixe de niches*". Ne doit-elle pas se développer pour prendre en compte les processus de transformation et de changement des niches elles-mêmes, voire dans la création de nouvelles niches ? Processus aléatoire ou téléologique de sélection de cas "possibles" mais a priori pas "nécessaires". La "*prolifération des niches*" transforme profondément les conditions de la compétition et ne permet pas la prédiction (ou le calcul de l'*optimum*) de la victoire du seul "plus apte" ! Interprétant les théories de l'évolution dans les contextes sociaux et culturels familiers aux économistes, H.A. Simon reconsidère la formation des processus d'apprenance¹ et d'apprentissage au sein des organisations. Il montre ainsi, par exemple, que l'on peut ainsi rendre compte des comportements altruistes en parallèle avec les comportements égoïstes : dès lors que la rationalité des comportements s'entend sur le mode dialectique, ou procédural, en gérant "*l'interaction moyens - fins*" ("*means-ends-analysis*" : le choix des moyens pour atteindre une fin suggérant le choix d'une nouvelle fin, laquelle suggère le choix de nouveaux moyens...). On peut rendre compte et interpréter les comportements socio-économiques de façon intelligible et plausible. Ce que l'on perd en (illusoire) prédictibilité (que proposait l'économique énergétique), on le gagne en intelligibilité : "*Les théories évolutionnistes qui privilégient les processus d'élaboration des niches décrivent un système qui n'évolue pas vers une fin donnée, sinon peut-être vers quelque sorte de complexité croissante*" (p. 71)... et donc d'imprévisibilité potentielle croissante. Il résulte de ceci, ajoute H.A. Simon, que "*la téléologie de ce processus évolutif est d'un type particulier. Il n'y a pas de but, seulement un processus de recherche et d'amélioration. La finalité du système est dans ce processus de recherche*" ("*Searching is the End*")... "*L'évolution dans un univers complexe spécifie des moyens (les processus de variation et de sélection) qui ne conduisent à aucune fin prévisible*" (p. 70).

La conception de la rationalité qu'impliquent les nouvelles théories de l'évolution, libérées de la contrainte du monopole du "programme génétique", se révèle différente de celle impliquée par le programme énergétique, mais elle n'est pas "moins" scientifique. Le langage de la génétique ou de l'évolutionnisme propose à l'Économique des métaphores modélisatrices différentes de celles que lui apportait le langage de l'Énergétique (gènes ou routines, niches ou organisation, variation ou innovation, sélection ou changement, adaptation ou assimilation et accommodation, etc...), privilégiant la description de processus plutôt que la description d'états. Dans ce langage, l'évolutionnisme propose des procédures de raisonnement aussi explicites et potentiellement formalisables que ne le fait l'énergétique (aux deux "principes" qui caractérisent l'Énergétique, correspondraient par exemple les deux principes de variation et sélection qui caractérisent l'évolutionnisme).

Le Paradigme Néo-évolutionniste assure son caractère téléologique

La crédibilité scientifique (ou la légitimité épistémologique) des deux paradigmes, l'Énergétique et l'Évolutionniste, est a priori équivalente : l'un assure "prédire l'inéluctable nécessaire" sans comprendre (ou a fortiori "expliquer" : ainsi la théorie du "*as if*" de M. Friedman observe H.A. Simon, p. 38)... et échoue souvent. L'autre propose une "compréhension de l'émergence de possibles" sans prédire l'occurrence de l'un d'eux qu'il faudrait a posteriori tenir pour nécessaire.

On comprend que cette maturation épistémologique des théories de l'évolution suscite un

¹ Le concept d'apprenance organisationnelle est introduit dans un article intitulé : "*Apprentissage et apprenance, la connaissance entre mimesis et poïesis*" dans J. Mallet, Ed., "*L'organisation apprenante*", T.1, 1996, Université de Provence.

intérêt croissant chez les économistes, malgré les difficultés qu'ils ont à renoncer aux monopoles de la rationalité déductive (ou substantive) auxquels ils s'étaient accoutumés (P.A. Samuelson les avait déjà invités à affronter cette difficulté dans sa préface au traité de N. Georgescu-Roegen, 1970, p. IX). Et la "plausibilité" d'une Économie évolutionniste désormais alternative reconnue suscite une sorte d'ouverture épistémologique au sein de laquelle peuvent se redéployer les épistémologies de la science économique, trop longtemps confinées aux seules querelles méthodologiques sans remise en question de ses hypothèses gnoseologiques.

Exercice auquel H.A. Simon nous invite prudemment dans le petit ouvrage de 1983 dont on vient de discuter sommairement le chapitre central (et auquel il s'est livré un peu plus longuement en d'autres occasions¹), que l'on peut poursuivre... non moins prudemment... pour amorcer l'exploration de l'une des voies que suggère l'ouverture suscitée par la renaissance de l'évolutionnisme en Économie, voie que l'on peut reconnaître dans une "Économie Pragmatique", (en entendant la Pragmatique dans la diversité de ses origines et de ses développements : C. Peirce, W. James, J. Dewey, G. Bateson, N. Rescher, R. Rorty,...).

L'Économie Évolutionniste : Rationalité dialectique et téléologique

On peut en effet s'étonner du caractère apparemment paradoxal du titre retenu par H.A. Simon pour argumenter sa conception de la rationalité impliquée par les nouvelles théories de l'évolution : "*Rationalité et téléologie*" alors qu'il ne fait pratiquement pas une seule fois référence explicitement au concept de téléologie dans son article (dans un de ses textes antérieurs, "*l'architecture de la complexité*", publié pour la première fois vingt ans auparavant en 1963, il soulignait même que la théorie de l'évolution "*ne postule aucun dispositif téléologique... la complexité émergeant des formes simples par des processus purement aléatoires... c'est la stabilité des formes complexes qui constitue leur finalité...*"²). En 1983, le concept de téléologie n'avait pas encore "bonne presse" dans la littérature scientifique, sans doute parce qu'on avait oublié la caution argumentée que lui avait donnée Kant dans la "3^{ème} critique" qu'on lisait bien rarement³! Il y avait bien quelqu'audace à restaurer l'usage d'un concept dont le biologiste F. Jacob confessait en 1970 "*qu'il ne pouvait pas s'en passer, mais qu'il n'osait pas le montrer en public*"⁴ malgré le crédit contemporain que lui avait redonné en 1943 N. Wiener peu avant de fonder en 1948 la cybernétique. On comprend qu'ayant loyalement "annoncé la couleur", H.A. Simon ne se soit pas trop étendu sur la justification de la thèse sous-jacente, préférant montrer la téléologie en action : "*Searching is the End*", l'étude des processus de finalisation, plutôt que leur éventuel résultat, "les finalités". Il ne peut pourtant dissimuler la complexité de ce processus ; mais il semble ne le faire "qu'en passant", par sa redéfinition de "*la téléologie des processus évolutifs : il n'y a pas de but, seulement un processus de recherche et d'amélioration*" (*a process of searching and ameliorating*, p. 70). Le sens qu'il donne au concept de "*searching*" est relativement aisé à reconnaître pour quiconque est familier avec l'usage qu'il en fait dans ses travaux en sciences de la cognition⁵.

¹ Voir par exemple :

- "*Methodological Foundations of Economics*", in J. Auspitz et W. Gasparski, Ed., "*Praxiology and the Philosophy of Economics*", Transaction Pub. New Brunswick, USA, 1992, p. 25-35.
- "*Organization and Markets*", *Journal of Economic Perspective*, vol. 5, n°2, 1991, p. 25-44.
- "*Strategy and Organizational Evolution*", *Strategic Management Journal*, vol. 14, 1993, p. 131-142.
- "*Altruism and Economics*", *American Economic Review*, vol. 83, n°2, May 1993, p. 150-161.

² Repris dans "*Sciences des systèmes, sciences de l'artificiel*", trad. française, 1991, p. 180.

³ "*Critique de la faculté de juger*" : la première traduction française paraît en 1985 (Gallimard Folio). Une nouvelle traduction, due à A. Renault, paraît en 1995 (Aubier).

⁴ F. Jacob : "*La logique du vivant*", Gallimard, 1970, p. 19.

⁵ Voir par exemple "*The Principle of Heuristic Search*" dans la Conférence Turing de A. Newell et H.A. Simon "*Computer Science as Empirical Inquiry. Symbol and Search*", *Communication of the ACM*, March 1976.

En revanche, l'interprétation du concept de "*processus d'amélioration*" est plus délicate. Amélioration par rapport à quel critère ? Sommes-nous en présence d'une définition tautologique de "la téléologie... étude des processus d'amélioration téléologique" ? On pouvait déjà objecter cet argument à J. Piaget qui caractérisait la psychologie génétique par un processus "*d'équilibration majorante*" sans définir de façon générale "*par rapport à quoi cette équilibration cognitive est majorée*". Objection à laquelle H.A. Simon, se référant à l'inspiration de la psychologie pragmatique de W. James et J. Dewey à laquelle il a toujours été attaché, répondra que la téléologie entendue au sens de l'étude des fins ultimes, ne relève pas de la discussion des choix rationnels dans les comportements économiques : "*La raison en tant que telle, est instrumentale. Elle ne peut sélectionner nos buts finaux ni arbitrer à notre place dans les conflits quant au choix de tel but final*" (p. 106). Mais, ajoute-t-il, elle peut nous aider à reconnaître non seulement nos propres limites procédurales, mais aussi les limites des buts que nous proposons pragmatiquement pour raisonner, nous mettant ainsi en position de concevoir d'autres buts pouvant être entendus dans des contextes plus larges. La raison nous aide, mais ne nous contraint pas dans ces exercices de refinalisation ("*J'invente donc je suis*", disait P. Valéry¹). Le paradoxe apparent de la rationalité de la téléologie tient en ceci que, si la raison en tant que telle ne conduit pas nécessairement à la prédétermination du but (qui lui est donc exogène), son instrumentation est nécessaire pour la post-élaboration du but (qui lui est donc endogène). Cette récursivité des fins et des moyens est sans doute difficile à "admettre" dans toutes ses conséquences dans le langage de la science positive encore très imprégnée par le primat de concept de vérité "démontrée" ou au moins "objectivement vérifiée" ; conception qui a longtemps incité l'Économique à privilégier l'élaboration d'énoncés normatifs et prescriptifs plutôt que des énoncés descriptifs et pragmatiques.

Modéliser n'est plus ni moins logique que Raisonner

C'est pourtant dans cette direction que l'on est tenté d'interpréter la représentation des comportements rationnels (ou raisonnés) des acteurs intervenant dans les systèmes socio-économiques. Les observations empiriques les plus banales le révèlent en permanence, ces comportements sont rarement perçus par eux comme erratiques ou prédéterminés : ils les perçoivent comme raisonnés dans une dialectique fins - moyens - fins moyens ... qu'ils déclarent parfois "ne pas avoir le temps" de pousser aussi loin qu'ils le souhaiteraient. Lorsque ce raisonnement dialectique se manifeste sous forme collective, pour l'élaboration des comportements organisationnels ou politiques, il prend la forme souvent observable de "délibération" : il oscille manifestement entre la production de nouvelles représentations (de nouveaux "*schèmes assimilables*", systèmes de symboles désignant les "aspirations" (et donc les "fins" intermédiaires des acteurs) et de nouvelles investigations (ou raisonnements, par investigations heuristiques, *schèmes d'accommodation*, règles, routines et procédures), moyens permettant d'atteindre ces fins... jusqu'à ce que les acteurs déclarent aboutir à une solution qui "*convienne*"² et qui constitue alors une "*convenance*" laquelle constituera ou étayera peut-être une "*convention*".

Qu'on interprète en termes "*comportementaux*" ou en termes "*téléologiques*", la rationalité mise en oeuvre par les acteurs dans les systèmes socio-économiques s'avère effectivement intelligible, modélisable et empiriquement observable. H.A. Simon lui a donné, il y a quarante ans, ses lettres de noblesse sous l'intitulé, peut-être maladroit, de "*rationalité internalisée*" ou "*endogénéisée*" ("*Bounded*

¹ Dans le cahier B 1910 *Tel Quel* (Œuvres T. II, p. 574).

² E. Von Glasersfeld a proposé une distinction très éclairante entre les deux interprétations de l'*adaptation* que permet la théorie de l'évolution : "*to match*" exprime la mise en correspondance, ou en conformité, le système se comportant de façon conforme à la loi qui est présumée régir son comportement; "*to fit*" exprime en revanche la recherche d'une *adéquation* entre un comportement perçu et un comportement souhaité, une "*aspiration*", autrement dit la recherche d'un comportement "*qui convienne*". "*To match*" se traduit alors par "*correspondre*" et "*to fit*" par "*convenir*". Cf. "*Introduction à un constructivisme radical*", dans P. Watzlawick Ed. "*L'invention de la réalité*", 1981, trad. française 1989.

Rationality"), que l'on a presque toujours traduit hélas par "*rationalité limitée*". Il se peut qu'en privilégiant surtout l'interprétation des formes de raisonnement dans la modélisation des phénomènes (et des organisations) socio-économiques, il n'ait pas assez mis l'accent sur la richesse parallèle des formes de représentation soumises au raisonnement. Le langage et les métaphores de l'énergétique physique, puis de l'évolutionnisme biologique, imposant en quelque sorte la définition des catégories (représentations) susceptibles d'être considérées. Il se peut aussi que ce soient ses lecteurs qui n'aient pas encore su repérer les invitations à élaborer de nouveaux langages et de nouvelles métaphores qu'il proposait en invitant l'économie et la psychologie cognitive à faire "*comme la chimie au XIXe siècle*"², en créant de toutes pièces de nouveaux langages pour se débarrasser de la pression que les langages de la physique et de la physico-chimie (et donc de l'énergétique) faisaient alors peser sur son autonomisation. Il se peut aussi qu'il ait été trop longtemps sensible à la pression "du langage de la tribu". Il avait déjà tellement de difficultés à proposer de nouveaux modes de raisonnement "à côté" de ceux de la rationalité substantive, qu'il devait hésiter à proposer aussi de nouvelles métaphores d'appui.

Dans un de ses textes fondateurs des sciences de la cognition, il soulignera la "reluctance" de l'économique et de la théorie statistique de la décision à contribuer dans les années soixante et soixante dix au développement des théories de la computation et de la cognition dont elles avaient pourtant l'expérience, et s'interrogeant sur cette inattention, il conclura "*Modéliser n'est pourtant ni plus ni moins logique que raisonner*"³. Mais le statut scientifique de la modélisation a longtemps semblé moins glorieux que celui du raisonnement, sans doute parce que la modélisation nécessite l'explicitation de son caractère téléologique : pour modéliser un phénomène, le modélisateur est contraint de s'explicitier à lui-même ses propres intentions ou ses propres projets.

Le "Tournant du Pragmatisme" en Épistémologie ... et en Économique

C'est pourtant par la progressive restauration de ses capacités modélisatrices que l'Économique contemporaine semble pouvoir se développer aujourd'hui. L'expérience de l'évolutionnisme vient de lui révéler sa capacité à se dégager de l'emprise de l'énergétique en absorbant nombre de nouvelles métaphores qu'elle sait de mieux en mieux assimiler et interpréter, on l'a vu. Mais l'enjeu n'est manifestement pas de substituer simplement la métaphore génétique ou évolutionniste à la métaphore énergétique. Il est beaucoup d'ouvrir le champ de l'Économique à la modélisation des comportements pragmatiques des acteurs intervenant dans les systèmes sociaux. Ce que la psychologie, l'anthropologie et la socio-psychologie, puis la linguistique ont commencé à faire depuis plus d'un demi-siècle, en assumant le "*tournant du pragmatisme*" ("*The Pragmatism Turn*", dira N. Rescher, dans son "*Methodological Pragmatism*", 1977⁴), dans leur "*critique épistémologique interne, réorganisant leurs propres fondements*" (J. Piaget,

¹ Sauf en ou deux occasions (sur plus de 600 articles rédigés en 50 ans), H.A. Simon ne parle jamais de "*Limited Rationality*" que l'on pourrait traduire par "*rationalité limitée*". "*Bounded*" exprime "*ce qui est dedans*" ("*Inside the Skin*" précisera H. Simon en 1992). R. Morris écrit que le choix de ce mot "*bounded*" fut une "*erreur stratégique, ... un exemple de fiction paradigmatique*", et il propose de le remplacer par "*intelligent rationality*" (dans H.A. Simon et M. Egidi Ed. 1992, p. 198-199). Mais je crains que cette contre proposition ne s'avère, elle aussi, une erreur stratégique, suscitant le courroux des économistes mathématiciens qui militent habituellement pour le monopole et l'usage exclusif de la rationalité déductive ou substantive : axiome du tiers exclu aidant, oserait-on prétendre que "leur" rationalité est non-intelligente ?

² H.A. Simon développe cette analogie avec le langage de la chimie dans un article "*The Use of Information Processing Language in Psychology*", publié dans "*Les modèles et la formalisation des comportements*", Ed. du CNRS, Paris, 1967, p. 306.

³ "*Foundations of Cognitive Science*", M. Posner ed., 1989, p. 7 et 19.

⁴ Il est intéressant de remarquer que N. Rescher a publié en 1989 un ouvrage intitulé "*Cognitive Economy. The Economic Dimension of the Theory of Knowledge*". La dimension économique de la rationalité à laquelle il se réfèrera dans cette étude sera pourtant celle tenue pour "*la caractéristique principale ("salient feature") de la rationalité cognitive*", à savoir "*le principe de moindre action*", qu'illustre symboliquement la parabole "*du rasoir d'Ockham*" (p. 13). Influence sans doute de la thèse de G.K. Zipf publiée à Boston en 1949 sous le titre "*Human behavior and the Principle of Least Effort*", souvent citée par les "behavioristes" nord américains qui pensent y trouver une garantie de scientificité qui leur manquerait !

1967), l'Économique contemporaine ne peut-elle l'entreprendre aujourd'hui, riche de l'expérience que lui donne désormais l'Économique expérimentale ("Behavioral Economics") et l'économique évolutionniste ? Ne peut-on promouvoir une Économique Pragmatique se développant sur les interactions conceptuelles complexes entre Organisation, Information et Décision (chacun étant entendu à la fois processus et résultat, inséparablement) ? Sur ce noyau s'articulent déjà les nouveaux schèmes assimilateurs que... pragmatiquement... les économistes commencent à reconnaître : apprentissage et apprenance organisationnels, coopération et conflit, réseaux et coalitions, contrats et conventions, motivations et aspirations, gouvernement et innovation, autonomie et mimétisme, efficacité et effectivité, mémorisation et délibération collective, etc... L'audace des premiers tenants des "anticipations rationnelles" qui osaient s'échapper "à la marge" des canons du paradigme énergétique n'est peut-être plus de mise ! En s'installant de plein pied au sein d'un paradigme pragmatique (au demeurant pluriel dans ses manifestations), l'Économique ne peut-elle s'approprier non seulement l'exercice de la rationalité dans sa plénitude (dialectique ou procédural autant que déductif ou substantif) mais aussi celui de la modélisation de la complexité¹ ? Elle n'ambitionnera plus alors de "prévoir", selon les règles de l'énergétique, ou de "programmer", selon les règles de la génétique (ou du premier évolutionnisme), mais, pragmatiquement, de "voir" et de "promouvoir"² en enrichissant les représentations qu'intentionnellement les acteurs se construisent des situations dans lesquelles ils interviennent en s'aidant des mille "ruses de la raison" téléologiques et dialectiques.

N'y a-t-il pas là un ambitieux projet pour une science économique qui s'entende comme et par une science du génie, une science de l'ingénierie des organisations socio-économiques s'exprimant dans l'inépuisable complexité de "l'aventure humaine" ? Une économie pragmatique qui soit une nouvelle ingénierie de la production de valeur et de sens dans et par les organisations, sans se restreindre à l'analyse et au calcul de l'allocation des ressources énergétiques rares.

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¹ Exercice de modélisation de la complexité dont on trouvera quelques manifestations dans "On Theorizing the Complexity of Economic Systems" (Journal of Socio-Economics, vol. 24, n°3, Fall 95, p. 477-499) et dans "L'intelligence de la complexité" (dans UNU-IDATE Ed. "Science et pratique de la complexité". La Documentation Française, Paris 1986, p. 47-78).

² J'emprunte cette formule à E. Morin dans "Un nouveau commencement", Seuil, 1990.