Some Notes on the Life of a Book

Tiago Mata

CHOPE Working Paper No. 2021-11
June 2021

Center for the History of Political Economy at Duke University

Some notes on the life of a book

Tiago Mata

University College London, Department of Science and Technology Studies,
t.mata@ucl.ac.uk[1]

Abstract

In 2022, Cambridge University Press is publishing a 50th anniversary edition of Geoff Harcourt's *Some Cambridge Controversies in the Theory of Capital*. There will be two afterwords, preceded with this introduction:

> You have before you CUP's 50th anniversary edition of Geoff Harcourt's *Some Cambridge Controversies in the Theory of Capital*. The book is worthy of republication, and if the reader is not convinced by the text alone, these afterwords offer an explanation.
>
> Tiago Mata's essay is a study of *the book*'s global career, tracing its reach in terms of geography and in terms of readerships.
>
> Avi J. Cohen's essay addresses the role of *the man* in shaping how we think about economics and its history, and in influencing new generations of economists.

JEL Codes: A11, B22, B50

Keywords: book history, capital controversies, economics as print, circulation of ideas

[1] I thank Avi Cohen and Geoff Harcourt for comments on this essay. A very special thanks to Rosalind Grooms, Cambridge University Press's historian, who under conditions of national lockdown made available to me the Press's correspondence files and ledger books.

Bibliophilia

Economists don't read books, or so we are told. While economics is taught primarily from textbooks, research monographs do not figure prominently in the syllabi. The advice given to aspiring scholars is to leave book writing to retiring Professors since books distract from the more valued work of publication in top tier journals. And not long ago, it was common policy in University libraries to have computer terminals replace bookshelves in the economics and business sections. Don't read them. Don't write them. Don't keep them.

The reports on the death of the book in economics are greatly exaggerated. It is appropriate to remark this at the reedition of a book that is nearly fifty years old, an action that is a tribute to its author but also a celebration of this object that the reader is holding in their hands. My essay has a modest purpose: I want to convince the reader that *Some Cambridge Controversies in the Theory of Capital* has had a rich life. I want the reader to imagine the book as a subject with a biography. It has a birth story and it answered a calling, to become a world traveller. We can say that on those travels it learned three new languages and we can ask about its career in classrooms and in the halls of scholarship.

It is not for the sake of playfulness that I tell the life of a book. This book does not need my help to entertain and grip its reader. My ploy is to inspire the reader to look at economics in an unusual way. Economics is ostensibly an account of human affairs and historians of economics often draw our attention to its success (or failure) in guiding public and private policy.[2] But economics is involved in another, less princely work. It brings people together in conversations that, one hopes, aids them towards mutual understanding and in finding their place in the world. In these moments economics becomes a kind of

[2] Alfred Marshall famously called economics the study of the "ordinary business of life," a definition that is all things to everyone, humble ("ordinary"), ample ("life") and restrictive ("business").

communicative action.[3] Books are especially adept of this kind of work. *Some Cambridge Controversies in the Theory of Capital* was to different people an exposition of a complex contemporary debate, a history of economic doctrine, a sketch of a new kind of economics and a sociology of the discipline. The book was able to take on all these distinct characters because of its contents and because of those who held it and how they put it to use. Counter to the standard advice given to initiate economists, my message to them is: don't underestimate the power of books, they are uniquely resilient and reusable.

To Geoff Harcourt my little insight is of no surprise. Harcourt is a lover of books, a generous reviewer of research monographs and essay collections (Repapis, 2014), an avid consumer of fiction as of non-fiction. To verify this fact we need only to look at his prose. The wit that enlivens his writing is the "voice" of an author who understands writing and the experience of reading. And yet, to tell the story of the book as a living subject, I must cast Harcourt to a supporting role. *Some Cambridge Controversies in the Theory of Capital* has had a life independent of its author. To tell that story of emancipation we begin, appropriately, at Cambridge.

Cambridge conception

The story of how *Some Cambridge Controversies in the Theory of Capital* was commissioned by Cambridge University Press [henceforth CUP or Press] has been told before. In a 1992 interview, Geoff Harcourt explained to John King how the book came about:

> At that time Mario Nuti was living with the woman who subsequently became his wife, Frances Welsh [sic], as she then was. She was the economics editor of

[3] On communicative action, a term we owe to Jürgen Habermas, and on those works on the history of science that have aligned their inquiry with the history of books, I immodestly refer the reader to another short essay of mine, see Mata (2018).

> Cambridge University Press, so his bedside reading was my working papers. She must have read them as well, because she asked me, would I write a book based on the survey, for CUP? (Harcourt, 1995, p. 176)[4]

Just as a human life, this life started at a bedside.

The working papers mentioned in the quote were the parts of Harcourt's survey for the *Journal of Economic Literature*, which he completed at a research stay at Keio University. From Japan the papers were sent around the world for comments and advice. One batch went to Nuti who was about to complete his doctorate at Cambridge but would stay on as fellow of Kings College for another decade. Nuti and Harcourt had overlapped at Cambridge and had become friends.

According to Harcourt the story of the commissioning of the book is a tale of serendipity. It was fortunate that a friend had a personal connection to a CUP editor and it was fortunate that she took an interest in what her partner was reading. That story omits that this was not the first book that Harcourt published with the Press. A couple of years before with P.H. Karmel and R.H. Wallace, he had published *Economic Activity*, a textbook for the international market. Besides a pre-existing working relationship with the author, a book on the theory of capital that elevated a Cambridge critique of conventional economics fit well with the Press's catalogue.

In the first half of 1972 alongside Harcourt's book only two other titles were added to the economics catalogue, these were Michal Kalecki's *Selected Essays on the Economic Growth of the Socialist and Mixed Economy* and Richard Kahn's *Selected Essays in Employment and Growth*. And in the second half of that year, CUP published Michio Morishima's *The Working of Econometric Models* and G.L.S. Shackle's *Epistemics and*

[4] In a more recent publication Harcourt (2017) repeats the story, stressing his debt to Mario Nuti's careful reading of his drafts.

Economics.[5] At the start of 1973 the books added to the catalogue were Michio Morishima's *Marx's Economics*, Maurice Dobbs's *Theories of Value and Distribution Since Adam Smith* and the final volume (in fact the index) of Piero Sraffa's monumental edition of *The Works and Correspondence of David Ricardo* (CUP 1973). It was no accident that Welch was interested in Harcourt's book. These titles spoke to each other, encouraging a re-examination of economic orthodoxy, a revival of classical political economy and marking out a distinctively Cantabrigian strand of Keynesianism.

The vetting process at CUP has not changed much between 1969 and today. Subject editors like Welch received proposals or encouraged authors to submit them, and circulated them for comment with specialists before making a recommendation to the Syndicate, a panel of academics at the University of Cambridge that has oversight over the Press's activities. The book was put before the Syndics for approval on May 16, 1969 and on February 11, 1972 it was again considered to confirm its price and print run. The Syndic for economics, Brian Reddaway, head of the then semi-independent Department of Applied Economics, was not present at either meeting. Particulars about the vetting have not been kept in the Press archives but we learn from the book's preface that CUP partnered Harcourt with three advisers: John Eatwell, Ian Steedman and Mario Nuti. Contrary to today, most of the proposals presented to the Syndics were rejected. In 1970, 948 manuscripts were declined and only 211 were accepted. *Some Cambridge Controversies* was among a very small number of research works published by the Press in 1972. As I will later review, the Press committed significant effort and treasure in the promotion and distribution of its books.[6]

---

[5] In 1972 CUP also published several monographs of the Department of Applied Economics, a second edition of Brinley Thomas's *Migration and Economic Growth* and a textbook by J.A. Allport and C.M.N. Stewart titled *Economics*, the source is CUP (1972a) and CUP (1972b).

[6] Press Syndicate Minute Book 1969-70 and Press Syndicate Minute Book 1970-72, Cambridge University Press Archives, Cambridge University Library, UA Pr.V.89 and UA/PRESS 1/2/1/1/25.

Besides Welch and presumably Reddaway, shepherding approval, the book had a production editor, Arthur Foulser, and a publication manager, Elizabeth McKeown. If the commission and approval of the book was a happy and easy process the making of it was not. The original planning submitted to the Syndics on May 1969, a month before the *Journal of Economic Literature* survey was published, foresaw publication in November 1971. But in November there was not yet a second set of proofs and there was no index to the work. With a new publication date of 25 of May 1972, the book that Harcourt received by post that month was misbound with two blank pages before the half-title, and upon closer examination contained a litany of errors. The most startling of these errors was that the fs of functions had not been printed. On May 31st the printers were still making corrections and on June 2nd Harcourt was identifying more mistakes.[7]

In addition to Welch, Reddaway, Foulser and McKeow, C. Wright did the artwork, Julian Coleridge the proof reading, M.D. Anderson contributed the index and Robert Bush prepared the copy. It takes a village to help deliver a book. The result did not look like the object the reader is holding now. It had 237 (plus 10) pages and was sized 8 1/2 by 5 1/4 inches, also known as a Demy format. It appeared in hardback and in paperback. The jacket was dark grey, the title in block letters in 60 points filled 3/4s of the page coloured in red turning to orange, "G. C. Harcourt" in white capital letters was just below sized at 30 points and Cambridge University Press appeared at the foot in 24 points. The jacket design in the gradient colours was like a hot flame of words descending from the heavens, a minimalist but arresting design.[8]

One way to describe the origins of *Some Cambridge Controversies* is to picture a network of scholars with thick or thin ties to Cambridge. These scholars came and went from

[7] Correspondence files, Cambridge University Press Archives, UA PRESS 3/1/6/680.
[8] Stock and Royalty volume, Cambridge University Press Archives, UA PRESS 3/4/2/24.

Cambridge, like Harcourt or Nuti, but the ties of work and identity never broke. Harcourt always acknowledged the intellectual debt owed to his peers in drafting the journal survey that became the book. But to tell the story of the book and to appreciate its reach as material culture, one needs to add to that cast of scholars the professionals and organisation that helped make it.

World travels

The book "conceived" at a bedside in Cambridge was not issued out of Cambridge. The Cambridge branch of CUP was dedicated to printing, renown for long runs of exquisite editions in letterpress, Bibles and prayer books. W&J MacKay of Kent printed the "flaming" jacket and the bulk of the clumsy printing was done by C. Tinling & Co. of London, originally of Liverpool. The movements of *Some Cambridge Controversies* were dictated by the distributional hub of CUP at Bentley House in London, near Euston station. The book was "delivered" in London.

The book appeared at a key moment in the recent history of Cambridge University Press. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, CUP had been on the brink of bankruptcy. Unable to draw funds from the University, the Press relied on an ever-increasing overdraft facility with Barclays Bank. According to Press historian, David McKitterick (2004), its fortunes began to change with the hiring of Geoffrey Cass as new CEO, formerly the managing director of Allen & Unwin. Cass balanced the books and enabled Syndics to expand the monograph list. CUP had once been a printer with a small publishing side, by the 1970s the ratio had been flipped, its academic publishing was rapidly growing partnered with a profitable language learning branch. Alongside organisational and operational reforms, including the eventual sale of Bentley House (today high-end student housing) and centralisation in Cambridge, a key step was to seek out an international market. In 1969 the Press had opened a branch in

Australia and year on year it continued to grow its operations in the USA. *Some Cambridge Controversies* was in many ways iconic of this moment. It was a book about a set of Anglo-American debates written by an Australian in Japan and poised to speak to a global readership.

CUP had to sell books. It had to sell *Some Cambridge Controversies*. The first run of the book was 2500 copies of "cloth/library" and 5000 copies of a paperback edition, with a prediction of sales of 1000 hardbacks and 2000 paperbacks in the first year, in the second year of 750 and 1750 and in the third year of 625 and 1000. No sales were predicted beyond year three. The hardback was sold for 3,60 pounds and the paperback for 1,60 but it had a separate dollars price of 10,50 and 4,95 respectively. Besides appearing on its termly issued catalogues, the Press had a few ways to reach out to potential buyers. It sent a "Publishers Information Card" (the size of an index card) to 2115 libraries in the UK, Europe and overseas describing the book laconically as "discusses and evaluates the 26 year debate" "presents simple exposition of the issues" for "advanced students & specialists in economics; practicing economists." A slightly more attractive A5 sized leaflet with a paragraph summary and the table of contents was sent to 500 booksellers, 40 British Council representatives and to 6000 academics worldwide. Space ads were planned for the *American Economic Review* and the *Quarterly Journal of Economics*.[9] All of this while the book was sent to scholarly journals for review.

Books are keen travellers. They are travel companions nested in the pocket of a handbag or squeezed into an overflowing backpack. They resist the injuries of motion in the cargo hauls of boats and planes. We cannot record who bought *Some Cambridge Controversies* and where they carried it to. There are too many trails to follow and so many of them are distant and cold. But if we cannot aspire for comprehensiveness we can at least

[9] Correspondence files, Cambridge University Press Archives, UA PRESS 3/1/6/680.

infer the bounds of the book's travelled world.

According to online catalogues of academic and national libraries there are usable copies of the 1972 edition in Wuhan University in China and National Diet Library in Japan to the East, in Hawaii Pacific University and University de los Andes in Colombia to the West and at University of South Africa (Muckleneuk) in Pretoria to the South.[10] *Worldcat* records 616 libraries around the world with copies of the original edition and of the two follow up reprints, a Gregg Revivals reprinting in 1991 and University Microfilms reproduction of the 1972 edition done in 1992. The majority of those libraries are in the USA, followed by Germany, Canada, France, Switzerland and, of course, Australia. But there are also copies kept in Spain, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Egypt, United Arab Emirates, Turkey, Italy, Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden, countries where the language of instruction is not English. We know with near certainty that copies are unaccounted for since not all academic institutions have all their catalogues online and in formats parsed by *Worldcat*. In recent years copies have been sold on to the public as libraries have struggled for space. There is a small market in reselling 1972 originals. One book seller in San Diego, USA, promises a copy "as new" for 70 pounds plus shipping, while in "good" condition from library stock you may get one for a bargain 7 pounds plus shipping from a couple of UK sellers.[11]

A book whose title refers to the site of two of the world's leading anglo-saxon Universities seems to circumscribe a very elitist debate. Harcourt was aware of this and played on it. In the 1969 *Journal of Economic Literature* survey he notes that "it has been said that time is a device to stop everything happening at once - to which Dr. Dharma Kumar

[10] The source of all the library data is: https://www.worldcat.org/search?qt=worldcat_org_all&q=some+cambridge+controversies+in+the+theory+of+capital. Accessed August 20, 2020.

[11] The source of these prices and offers from abebooks.co.uk: https://www.abebooks.co.uk/servlet/SearchResults?an=harcourt&cm_sp=sort-_-SRP-_-Results&sortby=20&tn=some%20cambridge%20controversies, accessed July 17, 2020

quipped that space was a device to stop everything happening in Cambridge," (Harcourt, 1969, p. 369) he then amends this notion by adding the American Cambridge and the numerous visiting Israeli, Italian and Indian economists who had principal roles to play in the debate. Harcourt was averting the possible embarrassment of provincialism, he tells us that the work is far more global than his own title implies. The travels of the book vindicate that belief, it was taken up by libraries in major urban and university centres ignoring language barriers.

There were those who thought that the message was too important to be misunderstood or lost in translation. In 1973 the book was translated by Silvano Vicarelli and published in Italian by the Istituto Editoriale Internazionale of Milan. ISEDI had a significant catalogue of translated English works, many of them in management, but it also published in economics, law, philosophy and engineering. In the 1970s it issued a series on the classical economists, and several of the leading scholars advising the press were friendly to Cambridge Keynesianism.[12] The Italian speaking version of the book was thus framed as part of a revival of classical economics. In 1975 it appeared in Spanish, published by Oikos-tau of Barcelona. The publisher specialised in translations of English and French language academic books, in the middle years of the 1970s the bulk of titles seemed to have been on psychology and education with some titles also in history, economics and sociology. Seen from the vantage point of Oikos-tau's catalogue, the salient theme of the Spanish book was less the classical tradition in economics but its radical contribution to the political causes of the day, notably what it had to say about income distribution. In 1980 almost a decade after it was published, Dr. Denzo Kamiya of Keio University translated the book into Japanese. Harcourt had written the bulk of the work at Keio. The translation became the fourth of a series of monographs on Post Keynesian economics published by Nihon Keizai Hyoronsha, previous

[12] I thank Alessandro Roncaglia for sharing his recollections of involvement with ISEDI.

titles had been by Jan Kregel, Alfred Eichner and Paul Davidson. In the Japanese collection the book appeared as a contribution to the emerging field of Post Keynesian economics. The collection continues today with issue number 39 appearing in 2017, a translation of Luigi Pasinetti's *Keynes and the Cambridge Keynesians*.[13]

The online catalogues give us clues about the travels of *Some Cambridge Controversies*. The 1972 edition moved widely across the globe primarily to University libraries. There the book was rebound and branded with a class mark on the spine and stamp on its pages and put on shelves where you might still find it. What share of that edition went to libraries and what went to individuals we cannot tell, but the targeted marketing of CUP sought out institutions to ensure the planned sale of the stock in the first three years. In the reading rooms of libraries each copy would have been read by generations of students. We have also seen how some of those library copies have been resold in a secondary market to individuals. The three translations and the even later reprints do not appear in catalogues, suggesting that these were not marketed to Universities and were sold directly to teachers and their students.

As we looked at the book's life as a commodity we have seen it stocked, freighted, sold, resold. We were able to infer something about its exchange value and how it has preserved it. Now we must turn to its value in use.

Use value

My reader will have wondered why nothing has been said about the contents of *Some Cambridge Controversies*. Reviewing the book's key messages in an afterword of its reissue seems redundant, the reader has read it before reaching this bookend. Rather the question that

[13] I thank Masazumi Wakatabe for valuable information and context on Nihon Keizai Hyoronsha.

deserves asking is not what the books says but what its readers heard it say.

I have elsewhere "read" *Some Cambridge Controversies* to argue that it was a fundamental text in the making of a post keynesian identity (Mata 2004). In that reading I noted how the book was organised as a narrative where each part/act of the review built up to a conflict and to its denouement. To a sympathetic reader the survey/book was thrilling, a story of a daring challenge to orthodoxy affirmed by the orthodoxy self-inflicted humiliation, concluded with glimpses of a different way to understand distribution. I remarked on the structure of the writing because I wanted to make sense of the enthusiasm that the survey/book generated among like-minded economists, sentiments I saw documented in private correspondence kept in archives at Cambridge and beyond. To readers in the middle years of the 1970s the book raised awareness of and urgency for a new kind of economics. If my account of the book was correct then it was a type of literature for the young that served as companion to the advanced student in economics and the early career scholar. I won't repeat the details of my argument here, happily in the companion afterword, Avi Cohen draws out some of that argument and rescues me from immodesty. In this essay, I want to look elsewhere and more widely, beyond the epistolary networks of emerging post Keynesianism and show how the book elicited an intricate set of assessments and uses.

It is difficult to infer who was the common reader of *Some Cambridge Controversies*, no one kept receipts of who bought the book and once it became a library item that could be pulled off the shelf at any time, the scope of its readership is a test on one's imagination. We can learn only about those readers that were also writers.

The first readers of the book were its specialist reviewers. There were plans sketched by the Press to have the book reviewed in the *New York Review of Books*, possibly by Robert Heilbroner who was a trusted contributor, and Harcourt had hoped for a review in the *New Statesman*, but these did not come to pass. Instead *Some Cambridge Controversies* was reviewed in the main scholarly journals. These reviews were typically short, written by specialists with some background in the subject and who with only minor reservations recommended the book. Jan Kregel wrote two reviews, very similar but with telling differences. The one in French published earliest, judged that the book did not spell out appropriately the consequences of the controversy and concluded that "capital theory" was not so much a branch of theory but an anomaly, valuable for what it told us but not valuable in and of itself (Kregel 1972). A later review in English did not erase the criticism but it shortened it to put the stress on welcoming a book "excellent for teaching purposes" (Kregel 1973). Philip Neher (1973) welcomed it for "making the controversies accessible in convenient form" as a starting point for those interested in getting into the literature for the first time. Gautam Mathur (1973) thought it was "valuable" and praised its "lucidity of exposition in a rather difficult field." Donald Hooks (1973) thought it was a "rigorous, yet lucid and entertaining survey," a "poet's eye view of a controversy with far-reaching implications" that could serve as "a basic text in courses dealing with theories of functional distribution and capital." Sidney Weintraub (1973) applauded its "subtlety, intricacy, and breadth," he too thought it was a good student read but estimated that it would best suit the advanced undergraduate.[14] The list of superlatives describes a book that stands out not for its claims on originality but for its composition, clarity and coherence. Unusually for an academic review, these scholars also recorded their pleasure in reading the book, how "Harcourt had some fun" (said Weintraub), highlighting the book's "entertainment value" (said Neher, Hooks) and "humour" (said Kregel). The book's irony and puns did not please everyone, Donald Dewey (1973) thought it was "fey" an a "put off" that had to be endured before one developed a "immunity to this whimsey."

[14] Another reviewer Stephen Worland (1975) uses the same words "valuable" "lucid" and recommends the book for teaching.

Dewey was one of three critical reviews. Dewey's (1973) objections were oblique, more a critique of capital theory work than of Harcourt's rendition of the debates[15] and Leland Yeager (1976) thought that these controversies were "paper-and-pencil exercises" with no reflection upon the real world. These reviews told their readers to ignore the controversies not to see faults in the book. The review by Joseph Stiglitz did the latter and worse.

Over eleven pages, Stiglitz's (1974) review was unusually long and unusually combative for the genre. Because of those features, the author and the publication venue, the *Journal of Political Economy*, it was the most visible of the reviews. Stiglitz text is important since it possibly turned away readers, while at the same time it signalled that this was a book deserving of extensive disagreement.

Stiglitz faulted the book and its author as "one-sided" and "partisan," concluding that "by setting out in perhaps as complete and intelligible a manner as is possible one-side's view of the debate, Harcourt may have performed a service." That judgment is provocative, it implies that Cambridge UK's views may have not been intelligible and that Harcourt's book may have been of no use to anyone. In the detail of his review, Stiglitz judged Harcourt's account of capital theory as insufficient and biased and exaggerating the failings of neoclassical analysis: to him reswitching seemed to be rare phenomenon, and models with aggregate capital were unusual.

Re-reading Stiglitz to write this essay, what caught my attention was his attempt to explain why there was so much interest in the controversies, a clear indication that the book and its message were being welcomed. Stiglitz, impersonating the sociologist, thought it

[15] Academia is a small world and Dewey may have been returning a compliment, Harcourt (1967) had reviewed Dewey's book *Modern Capital Theory* as an "uneven" performance and "mildly disappointing."

necessary to explain only the UK side of the debate.[16] In an exemplary performance of the sociology of the deviant, Stiglitz explained that Cambridge UK scholars were prejudiced, individuals who "dislike what they don't or can't understand," misunderstanding the role of theory in economics, failing to empirically verify their positions and being moved by raw ideology. This description had a familiar ring to me, it was similar to how conventional economists had described radical and other heterodox only a few years earlier (see Mata, 2009).

The Stiglitz's review spoke to one kind of reader, and non-reader, those invested in the controversies from the neoclassical side and who rejected the book because they were unwilling to re-live the sequence of plays as Harcourt recounted them. Antagonists are also readers. These readers saw the matter as settled not because their side had won or lost but because they had withdrawn from the debate. They described the controversies as a waste of time by being focused on the wrong problems, for them irrelevant for policy analysis or for the enrichment of economic theory. Harcourt's book was an irritant, drawing them back in.

The near unanimous judgment of the early reviewers, minus Stiglitz, even among those whose endorsement was hedged, was that the book was fit for teaching. We can be certain that it was widely used in classrooms, but it is harder to tell in what courses and serving what purposes. A place to look for traces of use would be syllabi. Syllabi cannot tell us how texts are used, abridged, commented, ignored, glorified in classroom presentation. Syllabi don't tell, cannot tell, what students in fact read and what they made of it. Syllabi at best tell us something about the intentions of teachers. Because they are so regularly updated,

[16] One of the key methodological precepts of the sociology of knowledge, codified by the Strong Programme of the Edinburgh School, is the principle of symmetry. Any sociological explanation should apply to both sides of a scientific controversy. Harcourt was criticised for intimating that ideology lay behind the positions taken in the debate, even proposing a litmus paper test of how each protagonist stood with regard to the Vietnam war. However crude, Harcourt's explanation was at least symmetrical.

the administration of departments and faculties rarely keep syllabi in archives for long. Historians occasionally find them on the personal collections of a few judicious scholars. Bud Collier has been building a collection of syllabi and curating these on an online exhibit, most of these refer to earlier periods and subjects that would not be relevant for our purposes. Harcourt's text appears once in that collection, the journal survey not the book, as support to a lecture on "neo-marxian theories of the economy" in a course on Theories of State and Economy taught at MIT by Michael Piore and Suzanne Berger. Harcourt's text was in the company of writings by Marx, Louis Althusser and Antonio Gramsci.

Taking first reviews too seriously can make for a skewed understanding of the book. It makes us take a snapshot of intellectual positions that lie at the very early life of a book. As I have demonstrated, we are contemplating a long, half century, career that covered the globe and spanned academic cultures and generations. Many of the students that encountered the book in their classes became scholars who went on to re-read the book with different interests. We have no tool that can give us a comprehensive analysis of citations across such a long period of time and across all genres of scholarly and popular publications. The closest approximation at the time of writing in 2020, recommended by scope and ease of use, is Google Scholar. That platform identifies citations to *Some Cambridge Controversies* across 2079 publications[17] over 50 years. In the past five years alone, it was cited 383 times and although some of those titles refer to republished, older books, many are novel contributions to scholarship.

In the same way that I could only describe the outer limits of the book's travels around the globe, I can only outline the disciplinary reach of the book. Among the latest references the one that stood out to me was *Inventing the Future: Post Capitalism and a*

[17] Google scholar collapses citations to the *Journal of Economic Literature* article and the book, because they bear the same title. Inspection of a few cases of the identified works suggests that soon after the book came out the book replaced the article in citations.

World Without Work, a mass-market paperback by Alex Williams and Nick Srnicek (2015) arguing for a world of fuller automation and Universal Basic Income. In their book they write that in "the 1960s, the Cambridge capital controversy brought together heterodox and mainstream thinkers in a seminal debate about the foundations of the discipline – one that everyone admits the heterodox thinkers won," and they footnote *Some Cambridge Controversies* (Williams and Srnicek, 2015, chapter 7, foonote 61). The authors are a sociologist and political philosopher. Similarly, the sociologist of accounting Tony Tinker references the book repeatedly in numerous publications, including his *Paper Prophets, a social critique of accounting*. It is less of a surprise to see historians of economics reading the book, but it still noteworthy to see Mark Blaug, an historian not known for radicalism or heterodoxy, deeming the "reswitching" episode an "extraordinarily instructive episode in modern economic thought" and recommending Harcourt for describing it "blow-by-blow" (Blaug, 1980, p. 179). Elsewhere French philosopher and historian of economics, Gerard Jorland (2000), draws clearly on *Some Cambridge Controversies* to explain the intellectual crisis of marginal productivity theory for a famous collection of essays edited by historian of science Lorraine Daston, *Biographies of Scientific Objects*. *Some Cambridge Controversies* was and is read in debates about distributive justice. Robert Nozick read the *Journal of Economic Literature* survey and referenced it in his famous *Anarchy, State, Utopia*, and a few years later Jon Elster in *Logic and Society* also addresses the controversies mentioning the book. Nozick's reference is made in passing, acknowledging that "questions about the workability of marginal productivity theory are intricate ones," but in the following sentence defends the theory's plausibility with appeal to common sense. We learn that alongside the economists, heterodox and not, this book has been read by analysts of economics, its historians and methodologists, and by political philosophers and economic sociologists.

To describe how a book was read is to lay out an uneven landscape of uses and experiences that cannot, must not, be constrained into a few summary sentences. Readers were entertained, some were irritated. Readers were inspired and a few were appalled. Many readers instructed other readers to take the book seriously. To many, both within and outside economics, the book became a definitive account of a debate and to a subset of those readers also a revealing tale of the unsteadiness of conventional economic theory.

What a life

We have seen how Harcourt's words became a book through many hands and a few ordeals. We have seen how this print object travelled and travelled and then travelled some more. We have seen how its meanings were debated, contested, repurposed for teaching and for research. What have learned from the life of *Some Cambridge Controversies*?

I started this essay by announcing that books are powerful, remarking on their resilience and usability. Books are superior technology, between "cloth" words are a resource that a multitude of readers put to work. Whilst books like people have biographies, they live lives different from ours. I have highlighted the positive analogies, *Some Cambridge Controversies* has a birth story, it went on travels and had a career among scholars. The negative analogies are also important.

Some Cambridge Controversies doesn't live in space and time like you and me.

We live in places, bound to them by job or residence, even if through the work of the imagination we may feel we belong elsewhere or in between places (Appadurai 1996). When *Some Cambridge Controversies* travelled it never returned home. The book made its living in big and small University towns, when it prospered and when it didn't there was never a return trip. By being in many places at once, a book like this bridges space. It allows its readers to connect as if they were close. *Some Cambridge Controversies* helped make a so-called Cambridge tradition in economics into a cosmopolitan project whose key centres are nowhere near Cambridge. It is not that space does not matter, but distances are reworked into the bookscape, the sphere of circulation of the texts and communities created through shared reading.

Although books bear their birth date on the copyright page (edition notice), that date need not determine how they are read and does not prescribe a predictable set of moments, the analogues of an infancy, adolescence, adulthood, middle age… The time of *Some Cambridge Controversies* is not its own, books don't have due by dates. Its life expectancy is dictated by the policies of libraries, universities and publishers, all of whom attempt to anticipate and heed the appetites and needs of readers. The arc of a book's life is not an arc, at any moment a book can be rediscovered and be lifted to attention and use. It is clear that *Some Cambridge Controversies* was received and discussed with interest in the years after publication but unclear that it peaked and feel out of favour after it went out of stock. Books do not fade away at the speed of the latest journal survey and the latest batch of papers claiming a new research horizon. They resist the digital overflow and its side effects of memory loss.

The time of *Some Cambridge Controversies* is the present, a vast present that the book's contents are committed to redefining. In the words of another unusually literate economist, Kenneth Boulding, it is an extended present. It is a study of a thirty-year controversy where the dates don't matter. It is not a story of 1956 or 1969 or 1972. The ideas of Karl Marx, David Ricardo, Piero Sraffa, Joan Robinson, Paul Samuelson, Robert Solow, Nicholas Kaldor, Luigi Pasinetti all share the pages in lively disputation addressed to the reader. The time of *Some Cambridge Controversies* is the moment to reflect on the architecture of conventional economics and examine its foundations. It is the time to learn from the authors of the classical period and to reinvent an economics for social justice. The time of the book is now.

With this edition the book will set out on new travels, to new Universities and new centres of knowledge that were not there in the 1970s in a new geography of knowledge and economics and community. As it reaches the hands of a new generation of readers, they will not know its date of publication and they will not care to know. Its date is always today.

Bibliography

Appadurai, Arjun. (1996). *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization.* Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Blaug, Mark. (1980) *Methodology of economics, or how economists explain*. Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press.

Cambridge University Press. (1972a). *New Cambridge Books, January to July 1972.* Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press.

Cambridge University Press. (1972b). *New Cambridge Books, September to December 1972.* Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press.

Cambridge University Press. (1973). *New Cambridge Books, January to July 1973.* Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press.

Dewey, Donald. (1973). Review. *The Journal of Finance,* 28(4): 1056-1058.

Jorland, Gerard. (2000). The Coming into Being and Passing Away of Value Theories in Economics (1778-1978) in *Biographies of Scientific Objects*. Lorraine Daston (ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 117-131.

Harcourt, G. C. (1967) Review. *The Economic Journal*, 77(306): 359-61.

Harcourt, G. C. (1969). Some Cambridge Controversies in the Theory of Capital. *Journal of Economic Literature*, 7(2), 369-405.

Harcourt, G.C. (1995) Geoff Harcourt. *Conversations with Post Keynesians*. John King (ed) London: MacMillan, pp. 168-186.

Harcourt, G.C. (2017) "Heinz" Harcourt's Collaboration: Over 57 Varieties. in *Collaborative Research in Economics. The Wisdom of Working Together* Michael Szenberg and Lall B. Ramrattan (eds.). Palgrave Macmillan, pp.183-226.

Hooks, Donald L. (1973). Review. *Journal of Economic Literature*, 11(1), 75-77.

Kregel, J.A. (1972). Review. *Louvain Economic Review*, 38(2), 231-232.

Kregel, J.A. (1973). Review. *Economica*, 40(157), 93-94.

Mata, Tiago. (2004). Constructing Identity: The Post Keynesians and the Capital

Controversies. *Journal of the History of Economic Thought,* 26(02), 241-259.

Mata, Tiago. (2009). Migrations and Boundary Work: Harvard, Radical Economists, and the Committee on Political Discrimination. *Science in Context*, 22(1), 115-143.

Mata, Tiago. (2018). Economics— and History—as Communicative Action. *History of Political Economy,* 50(3), 623–628.

Mathur, Gautam. (1973). Review. *The Economic Journal,* 83(332), 1297-1299.

McKitterick, David. (2004). *A History of Cambridge University Press*, *Volume 3: Worlds of Learning., 1873-1972.* Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press.

Neher, Philip A. (1973). Review. *The Canadian Journal of Economics*, 6(3), 460-462.

Repapis, Constantinos. (2014). The scholar as reader: the last 50 years of economic theory seen through G.C. Harcourt's book reviews. *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 38(6), 1517–1540.

Stiglitz, Joseph. (1974). The Cambridge-Cambridge Controversy in the Theory of Capital: A View from New Haven: A Review Article. *Journal of Political Economy*, 82(4), 893-903.

Weintraub, Sidney. (1973). Review. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 406, 249-50.

Williams, Alex and Srnicek, Nick. (2015). *Inventing the Future: Post Capitalism and a World Without Work.* London: Verso Books.

Worland, Stephen T. (1975). Review. *Review of Social Economy,* 33(1), 85-88.

Yeager, Leland B. (1976). Review. *The American Political Science Review,* 70(4): 1270-1271.