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UFR 02 : Sciences économiques

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# The Automata & the Engineer

Herbert Simon's Quest for the Governing Machine

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*Para una lectora lejana.*

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# PREFACE

Even when applying different techniques of interpretation to texts, I have tried to understand how the circumstances of their production could inform their interpretation. Even just for the sake of consistency, shouldn't I apply the same standard to this Master's thesis? Shouldn't I provide the reader with the tools, the context, etc. that informed this research?

Pace Barthes, the author of these words is very alive. Knowing the tragedy of my country, one might ask me: Why do I wield the pen, as the Colombian fields bleed? Why not wield the sword? Or, perhaps, why not wield both? This text was written, certainly, to satisfy an earthly requirement: to obtain a Master's degree. But beyond that, what is the interest of writing for me?

Although this thesis is not a political pamphlet, it is grounded in political perplexities. To the recule of the state, who not only does not want to fund nor organize vast sections of economic activities, my generations witnesses a strange mix of "innovation", "entrepreneurship", and . If the political Left, of my parent's generation had an iron faith in the working class and the peasants to change society, today's politically dissaffected youth has all hopes in private enterprise to solve the evils of the world.

As Oscar Wilde once remarked, "it is easier to have sympathy with suffering, than it is to have sympathy with thought". Even thought,

As much as this document is intended to an academic audience, it is also intended to them and to my father: This is the beginning of a lifelong attempt to explain *¿Cómo fue que se jodio el país?*

Should they be right, this article is wrong.



## **PREPARATORY RESEARCH**



# DRAFT: FRAMEWORK

## MAIN QUESTION

In this thesis, I will trace the genealogy of Simon's ideas on the computer and computation to discuss their influence for his views on automation of decision making.

## MOTIVATION

The motivation for this thesis is a deep feeling that there is something wrong with today's society and that given that economics plays such an important cultural role in mediating people's understanding of the nature of political problems, it is necessary to understand what is wrong with economics to understand what is wrong with society at large.

Given this, I am interested in the context in which economic ideas originate; I am interested in the interactions between economic ideas, ideas in other sciences, utopian political ideas, and wider "pop-culture" understandings and receptions of those ideas.

In today's society, in which the future utopia is construed as the apotheosis of technological revolution—and *not* political revolution—, and in which the utopian discourse of trans-humanism joins corporate discourses on innovation and neoliberal panegyrics on entrepreneurship, we can see a relation between a certain conception of politics and the place and role that machines will play there, and in getting us there.

In the case of economics, following the intellectual debacle of the 2008 global financial crisis, in which those economists who gleefully took refuge in baroque mathematics were scorned for the empiric irrelevance of their theories, behavioral economics was presented as an alternative version to mainstream economics that would finally present a more realistic version of economics, by integrating certain ideas from Psychology, to better understand economic problems, or more simply, reality.

The reason for writing a thesis on Henry Simon is *not* to write another thesis on bounded rationality. Rather, the reason for focusing on Simon is because he was one of the first economists to embrace the postwar cyborg sciences, and because he played a key role in the foundation of the field of artificial intelligence. Given that artificial intelligence presents itself as the next holy grail of science in our generation, I think that it is worth to study Simon, due to the foundational role he played.

Particularly, I am interested in Simon because he was more *cyborg* than other postwar economists. Even though the economists close to the Cowles Commission embraced certain aspects of the cyborg sciences, such as a version of Game Theory, they were more conservative in their willingness to question to the Walrasian model, to which Simon wasn't attached.

In the end, Simon distanced himself from mainstream economics, to build a project of the sciences of the artificial, in which new modes of organizing society were envisioned based on his theories on artificial intelligence.

I believe that one aspect worth discussing of Simon is an ontological understanding of his idea of nature, society, the human, and the artificial. Being a cyborg, these domains blur in his work, and I believe this has important consequences for his vision of organization, and its political and economic consequences.

Since one of the important aspects of his vision is his idea of the computer, this thesis will explore Simon's vision of the computer. Thus the title of the thesis: The computer in the thought of Henry Simon.

The idea is to project this thesis into a Ph.D dissertation around the theme of the governing machine: the automation of political decision making and the delegation of all political responsibility to machines.

I am interested in the wider cultural influence of the ideas of economists.

Particularly, today's futuristic utopias, in which technological change, but not political change, is wished seem to me to be very problematic. c

Generally speaking, I am interested in ideas; specially, in the way that people come to understand and define their political utopias, and their definitions of nature and society.

Roughly speaking, with this thesis, I expect to understand better the épistémè of our time.

## THESIS OUTLINE

The thesis will have the following outline:

§ Introduction

§ Chapter 1:

- Section 1
- Section 2

§ Chapter 2:

- Section 1
- Section 2

§ Conclusion

Next, I will discuss the content of each of these parts.

### Introduction (15-20 pages)

In the introduction, I will discuss the importance of economic metaphors

### The importance of the computer in economic thought? (15-20)

I will discuss the importance of the computer for economic theory, specially in the work of Simon.

I might being by discussing Jevons's inspiration in the work of Charles Babbage.

## THE GENEALOGY OF COMPUTER (METAPHOR) IN SIMON'S WORK

In this chapter, I will trace the genealogy of the computer concept in Simon's work, and how it evolved.

### SECTION 2

The influence of the computer for Simon's thought on automation (15-20)

In this chapter, I will discuss the influence of the computer concept in Simon's work, particularly in its relation with Simon's ideas on automation.

### SECTION 1

### SECTION 2

Conclusion (10-15)

## METHODOLOGY

I would like to write a history of ideas in the style of Philip Mirowski.

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