Journal of the History of Economic Thought,
Volume 42, Number 3, September 2020

JHET INTERVIEWS: NEIL DE MARCHI, BY MARGARET SCHABAS

It goes without saying that, as a recipient of the Distinguished Fellow Award from the History of Economics Society, Neil De Marchi made significant contributions to this field. First and foremost, he spent much of his career as a renowned scholar at Duke University, the Mecca for the history of economics. As part of the editorial team of *History of Political Economy,* Neil helped to parlay that journal into the established and prominent place it holds in our scholarly firmament. Neil taught or supervised dozens of scholars who are now prominent in the history of economics, including Marcel Boumans, the current president of the History of Economics Society. But Neil's main legacy is his published record, the dozen books (mostly co-edited volumes) and the scores of articles and book chapters that continue to be read and cited. He has an uncanny gift for discerning interesting and under-researched topics and finding the means to deepen our understanding of them. Neil also retooled mid-career and became renowned among art historians for his pioneering work on the history of art markets.

The most impressive characteristic of Neil's list of publications is the range. His work spans ideas and practices from the sixteenth century to the present, in Europe, America, and Australia, and covers topics in both economic theory and applied economics. He has done archival work, data analysis, econometrics, and methodological analysis. He has contributed to the philosophy of economics, the history of economics, and the history and philosophy of economics. He has undertaken studies that also adjudicate the field of the history of economics, such as his bibliometric studies of the journal literature or his edited volume on Philip Mirowski's *More Heat than Light.* Neil has not only published prolifically but also collaborated with more than twenty other scholars, including his one monograph, with Abraham Hirsch, on Milton Friedman. His work is a lasting tribute to the value of collaborative and cross-disciplinary work.

Neil was born in Western Australia on Christmas Day, 1939, just months after the European powers embarked on World War II. Neil's paternal grandfather, of Italian heritage, had fought in the Crimean War for the British, and his own father had fought in World War I and lost an eye. Neil's father never fully recovered, and his poor vision contributed to an untimely accidental death while he was working on a sheep farm. Neil never knew his father. Fortunately, his mother had a good education for the time, having completed grammar school in Perth, and was able to find work as a bookkeeper for the

Thanks for assistance from the following: Marina Bianchi, Marcel Boumans, Bruce Caldwell, Pedro Duarte, Paul Dudenhefer, Kevin Hoover, Hans Van Migroet, Katie-Rose Repp, Jack Vromen, and Roy Weintraub.

ISSN 1053-8372 print; ISSN 1469-9656 online/20/03000439-447 © The History of Economics Society, 2020
doi:10.1017/S105383722000022X

https://doi.org/10.1017/S105383722000022X Published online by Cambridge University Press

flour mill in the nearby town of Katanning, where she had grown up. After secondary school, Neil went to Perth, where he completed a degree in Honours Economics at the University of Western Australia. He excelled and won the award of a Rhodes Scholar for the state of Western Australia. At Oxford, he came under the influence of John Hicks, and made the most of the academic offerings for which Oxford is renowned. To his surprise, before completing his Honours degree at Oxford, without a PhD or publications, Neil was recruited, in 1964, to a position as lecturer at the newly founded Monash University in Melbourne.

Neil taught at Monash for three years, including a course on the history of economic thought. In 1967, he left to pursue a doctorate at the Australian National University in Canberra. He completed this in 1970, with a thesis entitled "J. S. Mill and the Development of Ricardian Economics," under Graham Tucker and David Bensusan-Butt. He also met Craufurd D. Goodwin, who was visiting Australia at the time and who recruited Neil to a position at Duke University starting in 1971. Neil was promoted to associate professor, with tenure, in 1975, but in 1980 left for Amsterdam, where he was the adjunct-director for economic research at the Algemene Bank Nederland. For various reasons, he decided to return to Duke University in 1982 and was required to go up for tenure once more because the standards had risen. A few years later, in 1986, he became full professor at Duke University, where he stayed until his retirement in 2016. Neil continued to visit Amsterdam, however, and from 1986 to 1991, he held a half-time appointment as Extraordinary Professor of the History and Philosophy of Economics at the University of Amsterdam. On stepping down, he became chair of the Economics Department at Duke, serving for three years, 1992 to 1995.

Because so many scholars visit Duke, and because Neil is such a gifted interlocutor, his imprint on the scholarly world far exceeds the classroom or printed page. Neil leaves a strong impression the moment he speaks; there is never a word wasted or a thought that does not enrich or provoke, or do both at the same time. He also sets high standards, and does not hold back if criticisms are required. But he does so constructively, and with a Socratic method rather than by categorical pronouncements. One former doctoral student, Jack Vromen, wrote about Neil, "His character traits are only too rarely combined in one and the same person: gentle but determined, warm but clear-headed, serious and devoted but with a sense of (self) irony and humour." Another, Marcel Boumans, wrote that Neil is "smart, open-minded, tolerant and stimulating." He also refers to Neil's patience to coax out a good thesis.

The most impressive fact about Neil is his range of scholarship. He has published on a number of leading economists, from the eighteenth century to the present. Among these are articles on Mandeville, Hume, Smith, Ricardo, Torrens, James Mill, John Stuart Mill, Whewell, Cairnes, Jevons, Tinbergen, Leontieff, Friedman, Hirschman, and Douglass North. But Neil is even better known for his work on art markets, especially the Dutch markets. He made seminal contributions on that subject that are known throughout the world of art history and criticism, whereas he estimated that only about 1% of the economics profession is devoted to the history and methodology of economics. There are many more scholars in economics than in art history, however, judging by the average level of positions in most major universities, so in that respect, his reach is still considerable in either field. This interview serves to capture a bit more of the nuance and color of his career path and is accompanied by a recording for about two hours of the actual interview, and a list of publications by Neil and about Neil.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S105383722000022X Published online by Cambridge University Press

Schabas: Tell us about your childhood, before going to university.
De Marchi: My father died when I was very young, from an accident, and we moved to my mother's hometown of Katanning, a town of about 2,000 inhabitants, roughly 300 kilometers southeast of Perth, in Western Australia. My mother found work as a bookkeeper at the local flour mill. I discerned at an early age that she was not well treated on the job. The two men who managed her tended to laze about, while she did their jobs for them. I suppose this gave me some understanding that there are injustices in the world. There was another man at the flour mill who became something of an uncle to me; he was also exploited by the managers but was much admired by the town. Because he was in charge of the local film offerings, I was able to cultivate a love for the movies as I grew up. There was nothing special about my elementary or secondary education; I was able to study the calculus and some economics, but my school did not offer Latin or Greek.

Schabas: Tell us about your undergraduate studies. What steered you toward economics?
De Marchi: My older sister (my only sibling) had gone to the University of Western Australia in Perth to become a teacher, and she was the one who suggested economics. I had some very good professors, some of whom had studied at Cambridge University. I recall one professor, a woman, who taught the history of ideas, and we read the works of John Maynard Keynes, Joan Robinson, and John Hicks, for example. Or rather, she read aloud from these books, since pedagogy was not very advanced at the time. I also recall that my professors ran the gamut from the political left to right, and that they openly expressed their positions. There were only about ten students taking honors in economics, and we were well treated by the teaching faculty; they encouraged us to read and voice our own opinions. I held a position in the student government at the time, as the treasurer, and I also played field hockey and tennis. These activities, together with my excellent grades, resulted in my going to Oxford as Rhodes Scholar for a BPhil in philosophy, politics, and economics.

Schabas: Tell us about your studies at Oxford.
De Marchi: Everything changed, starting with the long boat trip in the summer of 1960, where I met other Australian students headed for England. I lived at Christ Church College and was assigned Roy Harrod as my tutor. But I quickly grasped that we were not compatible. He declared at our first encounter that "Keynes was always right," but I instinctively knew that to be false. He was also disdainful of my professors in Perth. I was able to switch tutors right away, apparently a request without precedent, or so I was told. I carved out my own path, attending seminars in economics most afternoons and befriending the more serious students. We covered the work of the leading American economists of the 1940s and 1950s, including the papers of Paul Samuelson. There were also social events for the Rhodes Scholars and there I met two American students with whom I bonded. Of course, most undergraduates at Oxford were there to drink and have fun, so I found myself set apart from the mainstream but with enough companionship to engage intellectually.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S105383722000022X Published online by Cambridge University Press

Schabas: What was particularly memorable about your studies in Oxford?
De Marchi: I came to know and admire John Hicks. I had already read *Value and Capital* while in Perth, and it had left a strong impression on me. It was clear that Hicks was a first-class intellect. He inspired me to follow suit. We read some of the classical sources then, such as David Ricardo and Karl Marx. Hicks had a gift for weaving historical examples into his presentation of economic theory, and he raised important questions about fundamental assumptions and principles. He had a following, and I believe there was some rivalry between him and Harrod. Sir John Hicks and his wife, Ursula Hicks (also an economist), would invite a few of us mature students to their home; those were memorable gatherings. Jagdish Bhagwati was studying briefly at Oxford and I recollect meeting him at their house.

Schabas: What took you back to Australia?
De Marchi: I had befriended two Australian students at the LSE, Roy Webb and Richard Snape. They were both completing their PhDs in economics, and I would go into London often to spend time with them, to see plays or museums. We also took some trips to the Continent. From them, I learned about more advanced economics, the work of Lionel Robbins, for example, or the legacy of Friedrich Hayek, who had left England in 1950. My two friends were both recruited to join the economics department at Monash University in Melbourne. Monash was officially inaugurated in 1958 but began to admit students only in 1961. At some point in my second year at Oxford, 1962, I received a letter from a senior administrator at Monash requesting an interview with him in London. I remember it as a somewhat intimidating encounter, but on the basis of that meeting, he offered me a post as a lecturer at Monash, even though I had not applied and would initially hold only a BPhil from Oxford. I was twenty-three, with nothing to show for myself, neither publications nor a PhD. I waited till I had completed my three years at Oxford, and in 1964 headed back to the Antipodes.

Schabas: What steered you toward the history of economics?
De Marchi: I am not really sure, but in those days, the appeal to history was much more commonplace among leading economists. At Monash, I taught the history of economic thought course. I suppose this was because I had read a great deal of the classics, Ricardo, Marx, Alfred Marshall, etc. But I had yet to publish or undertake research in the field. I had married while in England and my then wife, who is Dutch, thought she could better finish her medical degree and qualify as a doctor through the Australian National University. So we moved to Canberra and I commuted to Melbourne, about 600 kilometers. I also decided to pursue my PhD at the ANU, starting in 1967, and worked under Graham Tucker and David Bensusan-Butt. And I taught introductory economics at ANU, in their extension program. I wrote my doctoral thesis on "J. S. Mill and the Development of Ricardian Economics." The defense transpired in 1970, and the examining committee consisted of Trevor Swan (one of Australia's most distinguished economists), and Terence Hutchison and A. W. (Bob) Coats, both of whom were visiting ANU under the auspices of the School of Advanced Studies. After my viva in 1970, I went back to England for a year, as a Nuffield Foundation Dominion Fellow, to London to continue my research on nineteenth-century British economics.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S105383722000022X Published online by Cambridge University Press

Schabas: What took you to Duke University?
De Marchi: That is easy to answer. It was Craufurd Goodwin, who met me in Australia just as I was finishing up my dissertation. Craufurd had spent a year at the ANU in 1960–61, and returned because he continued to write about the history of Australian economics. More importantly, he had just started the journal *History of Political Economy* the year before, in 1969, despite strong admonitions from Lionel Robbins. But Craufurd had also become a major advisor to the Ford Foundation and was taking on a long commitment with them and hence a half-leave from Duke. He convinced the provost at Duke that I could run the journal and fill his shoes in the classroom while he wielded power in New York or Washington DC. Craufurd was also high up in the administration of Duke, first as secretary to the president and then as assistant provost. He had helped the university through the stormy years of student occupations in 1968 and helped to shepherd in a more progressive leadership that set it on the path to better racial integration. The situation in Australia had also not worked out for my then wife and the hope was that she would find more opportunities in North Carolina.

Schabas: Tell us about Craufurd Goodwin.
De Marchi: Craufurd was ten years older than me but treated me as his son, albeit with respect. He always had a number of exciting projects on the go and was able to find the resources to complete them. He was a man of ideas but also a man of action. Once I was ensconced at Duke, we would often have coffee on Monday morning, and he'd pitch new projects or ideas and suggest I pursue them. He was a visionary who had a gift for getting people to do as he wished. I suppose I was one of his projects as well, since even then it was difficult to convince his colleagues at Duke to waste a faculty line on the field of history of economics. But because Duke was fairly parochial at the time, and Craufurd was already moving in powerful circles, he got his way. In many respects, I owe everything to him.

Schabas: Tell us about your early years at Duke University.
De Marchi: I had considerable freedom to work and teach as I pleased, and was actively mentored by Craufurd. Roy Weintraub had been hired into the economics department at Duke in 1970, a year before me, and we rented his house the first year we arrived because he had gone to Bristol. Roy's PhD was in mathematics so he was hired with a different agenda, but we discovered a mutual interest in philosophy of science, particularly the work of Imre Lakatos. By the early 1980s, Roy had shifted over to our field. In collaboration with Craufurd and a few other scholars in the region, we three put Duke on the map for the history of economics. As long-standing associate editors of *HOPE,* Roy and I were able to oversee a number of initiatives with the journal, such as the series of thematic volumes and symposia. But I also worked in mainstream economics, serving as a consultant for various agencies—for example, the Brookings Institute papers on wage and price controls.

Schabas: Your early publications (1970 to 1974) were on nineteenth-century British economists, Ricardo, John Stuart Mill, William Stanley Jevons, etc. Tell us about that. Why did you choose that period and set of topics?

https://doi.org/10.1017/S105383722000022X Published online by Cambridge University Press

De Marchi: Well, I clearly had an affinity for Mill and could see that there were scholarly gaps that needed to be filled. I also think that Joan Robinson had stirred up controversy at the time on capital theory but also brought up debates about value. Mill seemed to offer much wisdom on those topics. My first paper, on the longevity of Ricardian economics, was published in *Economica,* and it repositioned Mill as the critical figure in that trajectory. A couple of years later I published an article on Jevons's reactions to Mill in the *Journal of Law and Economics.* I was also fortunate to participate in a major retrospective on the Marginal Revolution, held in Bellagio, Italy, in 1971. Those papers were published in *History of Political Economy,* and then reissued as a book with Duke University Press. I was lucky to publish in excellent journals. My fourth article, on Thomas Robert Malthus, Ricardo, and William Whewell, was also published in *Economica.*

Schabas: You interrupted your academic career and moved to Amsterdam. Tell us about that chapter of your life.

De Marchi: My then wife was not content with her career in the USA, so in 1976, having just gained tenure at Duke, we moved, now with two sons, to Amsterdam, first for the summer but then for good. She eventually became a clinical psychologist and stayed in Holland. In 1980, I took a position as adjunct-director of economic research at the Algemene Bank Nederland, having by then learned Dutch. But I found myself still drawn to the life of the mind and, after a few years, decided to return to Duke. Because I had officially resigned, regaining a post at Duke proved a challenge, but once more Craufurd waved his magic wand and found compelling arguments that gained the approval of the provost. I was, however, forced to go through a tenure review all over again. While in Amsterdam, I came to know Jacobus Johannes (Joop) Klant, a prominent economist in the banking world but also a scholar in the history of economics. He also had cultivated interests in the history of the visual arts, and he introduced me to Dutch painting. It was thanks to him that I was later appointed as Extraordinary Professor in the History and Philosophy of Economics, a half-time position at the University of Amsterdam. I held that post for five years, from 1986 to 1991. This proved very stimulating since I had a number of excellent students, and taught several more who went on to contribute to the history of economics. Among these are Esther-Mirjam Sent, Marcel Boumans, and Jack Vromen.

Schabas: Tell us about your research during these years up through the 1980s.

De Marchi: Well, one critical point was my attending a conference in Nafplion, Greece, to reflect on the applicability of Imre Lakatos to economics. This resulted in a well-known volume, edited by Spiro J. Latsis, entitled *Method and Appraisal in Economics* (Cambridge University Press, 1976). My chapter was on the Leontief Paradox. This was my first publication in the philosophy of economics. I also continued to publish on British nineteenth-century economics, an article on Thorold Rogers for the *Oxford Economic Papers* (1976), and a piece on James Mill for a festschrift honoring Terence Hutchison and edited by A. W. Coats (1983). I published less in these years, in part because of the move to the Netherlands. But I was also reading a lot of philosophy and methodology, and this yielded a short article in the *American Economic Review* (1984) and two in prominent philosophy journals, *Philosophy of Science* (1986) and *Economics and Philosophy* (1986).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S105383722000022X Published online by Cambridge University Press

There were other publications as well, a bibliographical analysis of the journal literature in history of economics for *HOPE* (1983), and several entries for the *New Palgrave Dictionary* (1987), including one on Nassau Senior. By then, I had published on about a dozen of the leading economists of nineteenth-century Britain. But I was more and more immersed in the methodology of economics.

Schabas: Your first book came out in 1988 and was quickly followed by, on average, one a year. Tell us about that period of your research.
De Marchi: Well, with one exception, they were all edited or co-edited volumes, and all of them engaged questions in methodology. The first book that I edited, *The Popperian Legacy in Economics* (Cambridge University Press, 1988), covered an important topic. I had a chapter in it entitled "Popper and the LSE Economists." This was followed, in 1989, with a co-edited book with Chris Gilbert, *The History and Methodology of Econometrics* (Oxford University Press). Both books were widely read and cited. I also published a monograph, co-authored with Abraham Hirsch, *Milton Friedman: Economics in Theory and Practice* (University of Michigan Press, 1990). And the following year I co-edited, with Mark Blaug, a volume entitled *Appraising Economic Theories: Studies in the Methodology of Research Programs* (Edward Elgar, 1991), in which I also contributed a chapter entitled "Re-thinking Lakatos." There were other co-authored articles at the time, one on ceteris paribus conditions for the *Philosophy of Science* (1989 Proceedings), and another on economists in the League of Nations for the annual thematic volume issued by *HOPE* (1991). The last two co-edited books put an end to my research in economic methodology; one was entitled *Post-Popperian Methodology of Economics: Recovering Practice* (Kluwer, 1992) and the other one was *Idealization in Economics* (Rodopi, 1994). So for about a decade I was primarily immersed in methodological questions, with a particular interest in Lakatos.

Schabas: You then swung back to more mainstream history of economics. Tell us about those publications.
De Marchi: Well, around 1990, Craufurd, Roy, and I decided to launch an annual supplement each year for *HOPE,* based on a theme and launched by a conference at Duke University held a year in advance. The first volume was edited by Bruce Caldwell, now the director of the Center for the History of Political Economy at Duke University. The first one I edited is a volume of papers responding to Philip Mirowski's seminal book, *More Heat than Light* (1989). This was based on a conference held in the spring of 1991 and published in 1993. A year later, I co-edited one with Mary S. Morgan, on the theme of higgling and market transactions in the history of economics. I recall that you contributed to both of those volumes as well. I was particularly pleased with my own contribution to the second volume, co-authored with my Duke doctoral student Paul Harrison, because it covered an area that had received very little scholarly attention. It is entitled "Trading 'in the Wind', and with Guile: The Troublesome Matter of the Short Selling of Shares in Seventeenth-Century Holland." Mary and I went on to publish an article, with Jinbang Kim, in the *Journal of Econometrics.* Years later, you and I would produce another of the *HOPE* annual supplements, entitled *Oeconomies in the Age of Newton* (2003). It embraced the work of historians of science, notably Jessica Riskin,

https://doi.org/10.1017/S105383722000022X Published online by Cambridge University Press

Edith Sylla, and Emma Spary. But the one that had the largest imprint, becoming a paperback with Duke University Press, is the co-edited volume with Craufurd Goodwin, issued in 1999, entitled *Economic Engagements with Art.*

Schabas: Did this mark your foray into the history of art markets?
De Marchi: No, I had already become intrigued with art and the question of its value while I was living in Amsterdam. I was in general interested in the theory of value and the idea of novelty and innovation in producing goods. My first publication, with my Duke colleague Hans Van Miegroet, is entitled "Art, Value, and Market Practices in the Seventeenth Century Netherlands," with the prestigious journal *Art Bulletin* (1994). We co-taught a course several times, and Hans and I would eventually publish about fifteen articles or book chapters, the last one in 2014. These might well be the publications for which I am best known, if only because there are many more historians of art than historians and philosophers of economics. I also published several pieces on art markets separately from Hans, in economics journals. One was an early and well-placed article, "The Role of Dutch Auctions and Lotteries, in Shaping Art Market(s) of 17th-Century Holland," in the *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization* (1995) and another piece was in the *HOPE* volume co-edited with Craufurd, noted above.

Schabas: You also began to publish and collaborate with your wife, Marina Bianchi, who is a professor of economics in Cassino. Tell us about those publications.
De Marchi: We met at Duke in the winter of 1988, and have worked together ever since. Our first publication, in 1994, was a critique of the New Institutionalism espoused by Douglass North, but we then became intrigued with the question of artisanal novelty and how goods are valued in economic theory. Other articles followed, and we continue to explore new topics. Not long before I retired, we co-edited a supplementary volume for *HOPE,* entitled *Economizing Mind, 1870–2015: When Economics and Psychology Met . . . Or Didn't* (2016).

Schabas: Let's finish up with an account of some of your other more memorable publications.
De Marchi: Well, I became intrigued with Bernard Mandeville circa 1990, and issued a couple of pieces on him, and then, even more, with Adam Smith. I wrote a few pieces on Smith and the arts, including one for *The Cambridge Companion to Adam Smith* (2006). I also taught a seminar at Duke on Smith and his contemporaries. I'd say that I have roamed over so many different topics; perhaps my analyses of markets, past and present, come most to the foreground.

Schabas: What advice would you give to a young scholar embarking on a career in the history and philosophy of economics?
De Marchi: I'd say to follow one's passions, to take risks, and to ignore the claims from one's superiors that there is no hope of a position. When I was a student, my professors had many interests in the history of economics that blended seamlessly into questions at the frontier of knowledge, but I'd still be told there was little hope of a position.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S105383722000022X Published online by Cambridge University Press

Schabas: When you look back over your career, what is most memorable and what provides a connecting thread?
De Marchi: Well, I think I was very lucky, to go to Oxford and be inspired by Hicks, and to get a job so easily at Monash, and then to meet Craufurd and move to Duke. I was lucky to have had time in Amsterdam and learn Dutch, because this gave me the prompt I needed to shift to the study of art markets. I believe that is the work for which I will be most remembered. But the best piece of luck was meeting Marina, and giving me a life in Rome that suits me above all else.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

To view a bibliography of Neil De Marchi's publications, please visit https://doi.org/10.1017/S105383722000022X

https://doi.org/10.1017/S105383722000022X Published online by Cambridge University Press