



David Colander: Polite transgressor

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Symposium: In Memory of David Colander

David Colander: Polite transgressor

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ABSTRACT

The author of this article considers the contribution to the economics discipline, and specific implications for economics teaching, of three pieces by David Colander, all of which attempted to reset economists' thinking about how economics is done, is perceived, and is discussed. All three pieces have been highly influential in economics, particularly in shaping understanding of the term "mainstream economics" and how that relates to two other commonly used categories: "neoclassical economics" and "heterodox economics." The author argues that Colander's contributions contain important messages for economics teachers about their treatment of history in economics, the importance of classification, and understanding the role and construction of categories in economics. Overall, Colander's work is evaluated as being transgressive, albeit polite.

KEYWORDS

Classification; heterodox economics; history of thought; mainstream economics; neoclassical economics

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It is an honor to have been invited to reflect on a selection of David Colander's influential contributions to economics. In this piece, three works by Colander are discussed, all of which demonstrate the breadth of his contribution. The first is an article in which he (re)announces the death of neoclassical economics. The second, developing the first, is an article coauthored with Richard P. F. Holt and J. Barkley Rosser, in which they sketch the changing face of mainstream economics. The third, also written with Holt and Rosser, is a book of interviews with cutting-edge economists, which provides an extra evidential base for the second article's claims. Collectively, the three pieces attempted to reset economists' thinking about how economics is done, is perceived, and is discussed. In their article, they examine some of their implications on the role of history in economics, the importance of classification and understanding the role and construction of categories, and the teaching of economics.

I conclude this article with a discussion of how David Colander might be classified. In an insightful earlier article paying tribute to Colander, his coauthors Holt and Rosser (2018) described him as an "economist watcher"; however, my view is that Colander might be described as a watchman, or transgressor.

The Death of Neoclassical Economics (2000)

"The Death of Neoclassical Economics" was an address Colander made in his capacity as President of the History of Economics Society, published in the Society's journal. In it, Colander made several claims about neoclassical economics (hereafter NCE) and its relation to modern economics. Specifically, he argued that NCE refers to the material developed in the so-called marginal revolution, developed later by Samuelson and others. Crucially, as the article's title suggests, Colander also (re-)announced¹ that since around the 1940s, NCE had been dead, at least in terms of its being the basis for cutting-edge work. Colander's argument was cautious and made clear that NCE was, in fact, not completely dead, particularly in teaching.

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According to Colander, NCE comprises a core set of elements, including the focus on static allocation of resources, aided by marginal tradeoffs. Underpinning these is utilitarianism, an approach embodied by far-sighted rational individuals, who are the key unit of analysis, and who are, via price mechanisms, coordinated in general equilibrium.

Further, Colander considered the abstract nature of NCE *as a category*, i.e., as part of organizing thinking in economics. Good categories, he argued, should (1) be simple and clear; (2) feel intuitive, natural, and acceptable to class members; (3) work well over time; (4) be descriptive; and (5) have a consistent definition. Based on those five criteria, while Colander accepted that NCE could remain useful in describing a set of ideas in the history of economics, he otherwise argues that the term “neoclassical” should die (2000, 129). In particular, Colander argued that NCE failed to meet his fourth criterion for a good category: it offers a misleading and unhelpful description of the current mainstream, hindering its understanding and development. Colander complained that current mainstream economics is too often equated with NCE, partly because it makes for easy contrasts, a mistake he confessed himself (130).

Colander draws several contrasts between NCE and current mainstream thinking in economic research, such as a greater understanding of people’s actual behavior rather than assuming far-sighted rationality; utility being deployed mainly for pedagogic reasons; and work on multiple equilibria. Methodologically, Colander cites work on set theory, showing a shift away from a focus on calculus, complexity approaches challenging methodological individualism, and a greater use of models built to achieve specific purposes rather than purely using general equilibrium approaches. For Colander (139), what unites the current mainstream is a commitment to modeling, organized around what Solow (1997) calls a loose-fitting positivism. He advocates for the term “New Millenium Economics” to capture this new activity and new approach, on which he elaborated in the other two pieces discussed here.

The changing face of mainstream economics (2004)

Colander and coauthors Richard Holt and Barkley Rosser (hereafter Colander et al. 2004b) developed many of Colander’s (2000) themes. The article was published in the journal *The Review of Political Economy*, which is popular among the community of “heterodox” economists, who were its main intended audience and on whom the article’s influence has seemingly been most profound.

Colander et al. (2004b) re-confirmed the death of neoclassical economics, distinguishing it from the mainstream and offering another view of what constitutes the mainstream. It argued that mainstream economics had changed and now no longer adhered strictly to “the holy trinity of rationality, selfishness and equilibrium,” having moved to “a more eclectic position of purposeful behaviour, enlightened self-interest and sustainability” (Colander et al. 2004b, 485).

Complexity is central to the article in two principal ways. First, it describes the economics profession as a complex system. Complex systems are changing, “too complicated to be fully understood by agents in the system or researchers studying the system” (485), nor understandable through first principles. Complex systems also feature variegated and changeable agents. Accordingly, “conventional economists often hold a variety of views simultaneously” (487). Therefore, economics should not be considered in static terms, an approach “*most* heterodox criticisms of the profession have taken” (486, emphasis added).

Change in economics has many drivers, including technological developments such as nonlinear and agent-based modeling, many of which come from outside the discipline. These techniques lead to possibilities that challenge disciplinary norms. For example, agent-based models allow heterogeneous agents and multiple equilibria to be explored. These ideas and techniques must be developed by individuals, often younger researchers (even “heterodox” ones) working at the edge of the discipline. Institutions such as the Santa Fe Institute give important weight to the new ideas. Also, key individuals are crucial because they allow “edge” ideas to get picked up by elites, who may have helped establish the orthodoxy but are critical of it. Colander, Holt, and Rosser highlight Thomas Sargent as someone who had existing credibility within the discipline and whose adoption of complexity theory was significant in propagating its application in economics. Eventually, they argue, “[a]t any point in time, and especially by the time that the term becomes generally used, a large part of the mainstream profession disagrees with important dimensions of what is then thought of as orthodoxy” (491).

Developing Colander (2000), Colander et al. (2004b) identify several emergent strands of the new mainstream, all of which have already sufficiently challenged the previous orthodoxy, to claim the mainstream is no longer synonymous with those older ideas. They cite evolutionary, ecological, psychological, and complexity economics as changing how economics thinks about, respectively, institutions, nature, rationality, and general equilibrium. Further, they cite computer simulations, experimental methods, and new econometric techniques as reshaping empirical inquiry in economists. Overall, cutting-edge economic research (“the edge”) shows economics is pluralist, albeit “loosely held together by its modeling approach to economic problems” (487). Moreover, “[o]ur view is that the current elite are relatively open minded when it comes to new ideas, but quite closed minded when it comes to alternative methodologies” (493).

A third influential contribution of the paper is defining economics in terms of sociological, as well as intellectual, elements typically used to define schools of thought. Thus, mainstream economics comprises whatever theoretical and methodological ideas “the elite in the profession finds acceptable,” that is, viewed “as intellectually sound and worth working on” by “the leading economists in the top graduate schools.” They claim this definition has currency and is not a “historically determined school” (490).

Finally, what has become arguably the most controversial and influential element of Colander et al. (2004b) is their treatment of heterodox economics, something “usually defined in reference to orthodox, meaning to be “against orthodox,” and defines itself in terms of what it is not, rather than what it is.” (491). Importantly, consistent with their discussion of the mainstream, Colander et al. (2004b) identify a sociological aspect of heterodoxy, for instance, being unable to access specific important funding channels. Significantly, because Colander et al. opened the possibility of having a non-orthodox mainstream, heterodoxy then looks different, “being both non-orthodox and non-mainstream” (544).

The changing face of economics (2004)

The themes of Colander (2000) and Colander et al. (2004b) are developed and somewhat grounded in the semi-structured interviews conducted by Colander, Holt, and Rosser with nine economists (hereafter, Colander et al. 2004a). They describe their interviewees as “cutting-edge” economists with “interesting histories” (Colander et al. 2004a, 21) who have been doing significant, innovative, and leading work in the new mainstream identified by Colander et al. (2004b). These economists are mainly of a different generation from those interviewed by Snowdon and Vane (1999) and therefore have different reference points, most obviously, to the Vietnam War and social movements of the 1960s, rather than to World War II and postwar reconstruction. Conscious perhaps of the power of established elite figures, the book’s final two interviewees are Kenneth Arrow and Paul Samuelson.

Supporting the notion of a heterodoxy (defined as opposition to orthodoxy) within the mainstream, many of the interviewees express disquiet with how economics is done, often concerning an over-reliance on mathematics. Deirdre McCloskey (Colander et al. 2004a, 31) objects to the “stupid attempt to turn economics into a branch of, not the engineering department, but the math department” at Chicago by Lucas, Becker, and others. Kenneth Binmore sums up this objection: “I think you have to have some mathematical training to count as being educated at all.... But in retrospect, the exaggerated respect for mathematical skills ... was a bad thing” (Colander et al. 2004a, 74). Colander raised this objection many times, for instance, in Colander (2000) and his coauthored report on economics teaching (Colander and McGoldrick 2009).

Another theme connecting Colander et al. (2004b) and the interviews in Colander et al. (2004a) is that being a figure on the cutting edge can be challenging, “especially for those whose proclivity is toward attacking, rather than working within the existing field” (Colander et al. 2004b, 496), a comment aimed mainly at heterodox economists. Furthermore, Binmore, who characterizes the people in the book (Colander et al. 2004a) as “eccentrics” (73), describes how “all the time I was being denounced by behavioural economists for defending backward induction, I was simultaneously in trouble with game theorists for attacking it” (54). However, these interviewees were driven by a desire to effect change and an unwillingness to accept things as they are. For Herbert Gintis: “I can assure you that there is not a moment when I do economics, or whatever I do, that I’m not thinking about how this is going to make a better world” (87).

Discussion

In this section, I consider some of the main themes that, in my view, are present in the three contributions discussed. Given the *journal* in which this article appears and given Colander's numerous significant interventions on the teaching of economists (*inter alia*, Colander and Klammer 1987; Colander 2007; Colander and McGoldrick 2009; Colander et al. 2009; Colander 2015), I will explore some implications of these three pieces for teaching economics.

History(ies) matters

One key message of all three contributions discussed here is that histories matter, be they of economies, the economics discipline, or individual economists. They affect our understanding of the past and the present and crucially shape the future, so it is important to get them "right."

History is an important feature of the discipline as a complex system. As Colander et al. (2004b) note, old ideas get recycled and reinvented. Of course, some do not, and others get altered, such that their original meaning gets obscured; and yet others that were not adopted in their original context may be more acceptable later, perhaps presented using different modes of communication. The interviews in Colander et al. (2004a) also illustrate the concept of equifinality: different paths leading to the same outcome. The interviewees are in similarly influential positions but traversed the discipline in very different ways. For example, Herbert Gintis was a Marxist who embraced experimentalism and complexity. Indeed, a willingness to explore and change one's mind is an important trait for the interviews. At a system level, these changes by individuals, and the interactions among them, can drive systems to places often far from what might have been thought of as their equilibrium. One therefore must build such possibilities into our thinking and remain vigilant, either for new theoretical developments or in areas of policy (see Dow 2009).

Colander had been a leading proponent of the method of exploring life histories via interviews, both with leading economists (Colander et al. 2004a) and budding scholars (Colander and Klammer 1987; Colander 2007). These oral accounts tease out the respondents' deeper thoughts and their interactions in academia or in policymaking (Jullien 2018) and allow aspects to be explored, such as the psychological dimensions of being an economist, and their agency in choosing one path over another. Crucially, they allow us to learn (the economists' story of) how they developed and avoid a static view of the individual and hence the wider community. The accounts in Colander et al. (2004a), Snowden and Vane (1999), Bowmaker (2010), and Arestis and Sawyer (2001) illuminate how economists navigate the discipline. Such interviews also show the importance of supportive and inspiring teachers and advisors (see Mearman, Berger, and Guizzo 2022). Simultaneously, they demystify these prestigious economists, who recognize the role of chance in their own professional lives. Robert Frank captures this sentiment well, saying, "I think of my career as a sequence of unplanned accidents" (Colander et al. 2004a, 111). In complex systems, these chance events can have large impacts in specific contexts. As teachers, reminding students of the contingency of their lifepaths can be valuable, especially for those whose outcomes are worse than expected.

Also, in terms of teaching economics and thinking like an economist, two main implications might be drawn from Colander's emphasis on history. The first is about the diversity of method and evidence, the value of which Colander repeatedly demonstrated via his employment of life histories, a genuinely qualitative form of data collection and analysis. Second, economic history and history of thought matter, and students ought to understand these, not least as in recognizing old ideas that might still be valuable, and via a better understanding of past ideas, create better conditions for progress in economics.

At an event at the 2009 ASSA meetings organized by Colander, in response to a question about whether the financial crisis meant Keynes, Marx, or Minsky should be taught more, one contributor asserted that "we shouldn't allow a once-in-a-75-year event to change what we teach." This comment downplayed the frequency of financial crises, seemed dismissive of alternatives, and perhaps betrayed an unwillingness to change. Colander's reaction to this event is unknown, but elsewhere, Colander et al.'s (2009) analysis of the financial crisis "and the systemic failure of the economics profession" (250) suggests he disagreed. Further, Holt and Rosser (2018, 549) note that Colander "mourned that the educational environment

was now unlikely to produce ... economists ... all of whom exhibited a broad and historical knowledge.” This urging to economists to engage more with history, and with historically correct definitions, is revisited below in the consideration of neoclassical economics.

Classification matters

Colander’s work has profoundly influenced the understanding and use of the categories neoclassical, mainstream, and heterodox economics. Before considering this impact, it should be noted that his critical arguments about classification *per se* are also important. Colander (2000, 128) recognizes that even if categories feel “natural,” how things are currently arranged is serendipitous, but also have been arranged by groups of economists, and members of the class will largely determine whether the term will persist. Like Hodgson’s recent (2019) work on heterodox economics, Colander argues that a classification with too many definitions will not last long. Colander also acknowledges the role of power in arriving at definitions, their use, and their persistence. In these ways, Colander echoes the interdisciplinary work of Bowker and Star (1999), who distinguish between *classical* and *modern* categories. While classical categories are fixed, certain, and may be regarded as having a natural state, modern categories are flexible, fuzzy, and constructed for political purposes. Thus, while the content of classifications matters, one must also consider their nature and purpose.

One such purpose might be for the psychological benefit of the individual or the social benefit of a group of economists. As do other collections of interviews, Colander et al. (2004a) show the importance of self-labeling. As already alluded to, the economists interviewed often enjoyed the role of outsider. Robert Frank (110) exemplifies this: “If I do have a trait that’s different from more traditional economists, it is that I’m more disquieted when I see something that I think should be one way and it’s a different way. I feel more troubled by that than many other people seem to be.” Similar sentiments can be found in various contributions to the interview collections in Snowdon and Vane (1999) and in Mearman, Berger, and Guizzo’s (2019) conversations with heterodox economists. Interestingly, the label heterodox is one that is simultaneously chosen by some economists but rejected by others in the same group (cf. Fullbrook 2019; Darity 2019) and held to different degrees (Mearman 2011). Notably, in Colander et al. (2004a), Richard Norgaard, when asked if ecological economics is “terribly heterodox,” says: “Yes, I hope so” (224) but also says, “I try to be a constructive dissenter” (240).

In teaching terms, it is important to help students get classifications right. Here, in my view, can be seen a link to Colander’s overarching approach to economics: Colander’s classifications of neoclassical, mainstream, and heterodox economics are *realytic* (Colander and Lerner 1980, vii), i.e., as being both realistic and analytic. They are grounded empirically and seek to reflect the real messiness of each object. Colander accepted that categories were necessarily simplifications but argued against oversimplification, in categorization and in modeling.

Moreover, thinking about why those classifications exist, how and why they have been constructed, and being flexible with them are important empirical skills for economists. Data literacy is an essential research capacity for any economist to develop, and a key element of which is understanding exactly what a category means, how it is measured, and why it was constructed. As Bowker and Star (1999) illustrate, the fact that a category exists means that it has already been designated as valuable by someone, group, or institution. It is important for a data-literate economist to understand all these dimensions of a metric before deploying it.

I now turn to three specific categories on which the three discussed pieces constitute a significantly influential contribution to our understanding of economics. First, “neoclassical economics” and “mainstream economics” and their relationship are explored, followed by “heterodox economics.”

Is neoclassical economics dead?

In papers that cite Colander (2000) and Colander et al. (2004b), commentators accept Colander’s argument that one must be careful not to lazily equate NCE and mainstream economics. Davis (2006) agrees that NCE no longer dominates modern economics, and Lawson (2013) agrees that one possible course

would be to jettison the term altogether. Of course, Colander was explicit that NCE was *not* dead, not least living on in aspects of practice, such as teaching (Colander 2005). Colander (2009) himself lamented the persistent influence of DSGE models and could claim that the diversity of modeling approaches within ecological economics supports his view of a pluralist mainstream. Moreover, he was cautious in his claims about the pace of change and the processes by which change might happen.

However, opinions differ on Colander's view of the relationship between NCE and mainstream economics. Bemoaning an inconsistency among previous commentators, Colander (2000, 133) states: "Either modern economics is part of neoclassical economics or it isn't." Colander claims modern economics is fundamentally different from NCE, being more eclectic and having a different worldview. In response, Dequech (2007) argues that NCE can still be *part of* the mainstream. Subsequent debate, particularly in critical circles, has been about the extent to which NCE remains essential to the modern mainstream economics.

Others have argued against the *separation* of neoclassical and mainstream economics, claiming that the former retains a significant underlying influence on the latter. Stilwell (2023), echoing others, still sees a neoclassical economic core to the mainstream, operating "rather like a gravitational force" (191) through its underlying logic and principles. For instance, Shaikh (in Mearman, Berger, and Guizzo 2019, 212, 217) describes mainstream economics as a *perfectionist* approach—comparing reality with ideal outcomes rather than beginning by taking reality as it is. Arguably, even in behavioral and informational economics, the utility-maximizing neoclassical agent lurks in the background as a yardstick for actual behavior (cf. Akerlof and Shiller 2016). In contrast to Norgaard's positioning of ecological economics as "terribly heterodox," some ecological economists have argued that some of its strands retain strongly neoclassical elements, such as a commitment to general equilibrium theory (Pirgmaier 2017). Consequently, critics view NCE as alive, or echoing Fine (2010), as a zombie—undead, still walking among us, slow-moving but capable of biting.

What is heterodox economics?

In terms of heterodox economics, the influence of Colander's intervention is clear, not least by the number of contributions contesting his claims: first, as discussed above, about the definition of the mainstream, and second, rejecting the characterization of heterodox economics laid out in Colander et al. (2004b). Certainly, that paper has become a standard reference text for those engaging with the definitions of mainstream and heterodox economics and the relationship between the two (see Lawson 2006; Fine and Milonakis 2009; Lee 2009; Dobusch and Kapeller 2012; Mirowski and Nik-Khah 2017; Hodgson 2019). More recently, Reinke's (2024) empirical study uses what he calls *Colander's Edge* to help classify and map power relations in German economics. The work has been cited outside the discipline in commentaries on economics (Maesse 2015).

Many of the arguments of Colander (2000) and Colander et al. (2004a, 2004b) have been conditionally accepted. For instance, Davis (2007) accepts their proposition of a heterodoxy within the mainstream. Of particular importance has been the distinction made between intellectual and sociological dimensions of heterodoxy (Dequech 2007) and its acknowledgment of the importance of power relations in the economics discipline, something acknowledged by Colander et al. (2004b) and which unites the notionally heterodox interviewees in Mearman, Berger, and Guizzo (2019).

Colander et al.'s (2004b) attempt to break down distinctions between mainstream and heterodox economics has been more controversial, for instance, by claiming, "The edge of economics is that part of mainstream economics that is critical of orthodoxy, and that part of heterodox economics that is taken seriously by the elite of the profession" (492), i.e., that to some extent the groups overlap and can converse. Second, though, Colander et al. (2004b, 492) state, "Often, the fundamental intellectual content of a heterodox school is its rejection of orthodoxy, or at least major elements of orthodoxy."

The qualifier "often" is important but has inspired work to investigate whether this claim is true. For example, respondents to a questionnaire distributed at a heterodox conference scored on average 82 percent on a sliding scale that "I consider myself a heterodox economist" and scored 13 percent when asked if they consider themselves mainstream (Mearman 2011). Interviews with heterodox economists do not identify rejection of mainstream as a defining characteristic, even if they mainly disagree with it.

Further, several efforts have sought to define and advocate for heterodox economics as a positive project, emphasizing its contributions to theorizing (e.g., Kvangraven and Alves 2019). The interviewees emphasize realisticness and advocacy of plurality, as well as attention to power relations, as defining aspects (Mearman, Berger, and Guizzo 2023).

What lessons from teaching can be taken from Colander's treatment of neoclassical and heterodox economics, in addition to their reinforcing the need for care in categorization? Why should teachers or students care, for instance, whether neoclassical economics is dead? One simple reason is that depth of understanding matters, particularly if a modern theoretical concept implicitly reflects another. For example, choice and strategy imply the broader principle of individualism. A belief in the neutrality of concepts could be considered naïve. Another reason for caring is that, to paraphrase Keynes, economics teachers are slaves of defunct economic ideas, which act as intellectual anchor points, so that even if the teachers do not believe them consciously, they are revealed in their teaching.

Additionally, where possible, unnecessary barriers ought to be broken down, partly because they often lack empirical grounds (see Dow 1990) and because they limit conversation. As an extension to that, approaches that too easily dismiss alternative, sometimes fundamentally different, approaches also ought to be avoided. In a complex system, students must understand that one cannot rely on one set of tools—or even a scientific approach—to address a practical problem and practice that. To think like an economist means having many tools at their disposal (Nelson 2011). The new UK economics subject benchmark statement now reflects this approach: “Various interpretations—sometimes fundamentally different—of commonly observed economic phenomena exist, and hence explanations may be contested” (QAA 2023, online). Such an approach would support economists addressing big questions, as advocated by Colander and McGoldrick (2009) and more recently by Deaton (2024), and buck the trend of economics in “research [directed] toward clever, but relatively unimportant, publishable articles” (Colander 2009, 38).

As Colander understood, at the root of differences between approaches are often differences in vision (see also Heilbroner 1990; Dow 1996). Indeed, this claim is central to Colander et al. (2004a, 2004b), particularly regarding complexity as a different worldview from that which underpins neoclassical economics. Gintis (Colander et al. 2004a, 100) captures this as: “The big thing [in terms of changes in economics] is the abandoning of the neoclassical [GE] model as the basic way you think about the economy.” In teaching, understanding an economist's underlying vision can be brought out, and differences in these worldviews can be explored, even when they appear incommensurable.

Moreover, another important lesson from Colander's approach for economists is that effective communication matters. Colander understood the audience he had in front of him and adapted what he said to that group; contrast the changing face of *mainstream* economics (in Colander et al. 2004b), aimed mainly at heterodox economists, with the changing face of economics (in Colander et al. 2004a), which had a broader target. The mode of engagement also matters. As Holt and Rosser (2018) express, for Colander, it was better to use honey than vinegar if one wanted to facilitate dialogue. Being open and avoiding unnecessary confrontation makes one more likely to be successful and creates opportunities for growth. As Colander (2009, 36) expressed it: “Seeing the mainstream's rejection of their ideas as due to the mainstream's closed-mindedness may make heterodox economists feel better, but it is not a way to open up dialog between mainstream and heterodoxy.”

Conclusion: How might David Colander be categorized?

In this article, I have considered three contributions from David Colander, all of which are significant in shaping the discipline. Colander's work has changed how economics is discussed and thought about, particularly via his historical approach and by challenging economists to be clearer in their thinking about common categories. For a deep, critical, and self-aware understanding of economics, attention ought to be paid to the origins of concepts and to their nature. These injunctions are important for economics teachers, not least in encouraging them to consider their own practice. Such lessons are important ones to be passed on to students too, as teachers and students alike are keen to get on with learning and applying theory.

As much as his work itself, though, I admire the courage of Colander's approach, being prepared to take risks in calling out the profession before he had *made it*, to state his case, and to follow his own path. Colander repeatedly occupied the liminal space, operating in places considered somewhat marginal, such as the history of thought and economics education, efforts that have helped deservedly raise their profile. He attempted to shift economics in what he considered a more productive direction, for instance, into complexity (Colander 2000; Colander et al. 2004a, 2004b; other references) and to develop a post-Walrasian approach to economics (Colander 1996, 2006).

Reflecting his own background, publishing early work on inflation with Abba Lerner in 1980, Colander worked across boundaries, for instance, by working with Holt and Rosser, two economists who had themselves been liminal. Rosser does not fit neatly into mainstream/heterodox because his "book on chaos theory had established him as a legitimate modeller and an economist to be taken seriously" and yet "he was rather disdainful of [orthodox economics]" (Colander et al. 2004a, viii). Colander et al. (2004b) talked with heterodox economists and was published in a heterodox journal. Colander often ventured into places where one would not expect to find such a high-profile economist, such as conferences on teaching and on pluralism.

In their piece honoring Colander, Holt and Rosser (2018) ask how they would define him. Given our discussion of classification, it seems apposite to do so again. Holt and Rosser consider various options, including gadfly, court jester, nudger, and dissenter, eventually rejecting them in favor of "economist watcher," to capture his eagerness to observe economists in their everyday lives. However, perhaps Holt and Rosser's characterization underplays what Colander was doing. He was not merely watching; he was seeking to influence. In the abstract to Colander et al. (2004b), the authors describe the change they see in economics as a *fundamental shift*. They are trying to turn the dial. Thus, mainstream, heterodox, and neoclassical economics are not merely descriptive categories: they are desired outcomes. An alternative characterization not too far from Holt and Rosser's might be *watchman*, someone employed to look after a building or town, particularly at night and someone ready to take action to protect their charge. Perhaps this better fits the active Colander who, unlike the watchman, was concerned with not just the nocturnal—what McCloskey (1983) calls the official method of economics—but the diurnal too, the actual practice of economists, and asks them to consider what they are doing. Similarly, it invites economics teachers to reflect on what, and how, they are teaching.

Even this definition, though, may not do. As discussed throughout this article, a key feature of Colander's work and approach is as one who, without ignoring or not recognizing boundaries, is prepared to cross them, straddle them, and reach across them, at the same time inviting us to question the usefulness and purpose of the boundary. Colander can be seen, in my view, as a transgressor, albeit a polite one.

Note

1. Colander acknowledges (2000, 132–33) that various people declared NCE dead, including Hicks (1983).

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