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Acknowledgements

In January 1999 I started a Ph.D. in Economics at the University of Amsterdam. I remember when I applied for a position in the newly established Center for Nonlinear Dynamics in Economics and Finance (shortly, CeNDEF). I was fascinated by reading the proposal that started up the group. The inspiring idea was to merge young researchers with different backgrounds from mathematics, statistics and economics with the aim to enhance our understanding of nonlinear phenomena in economics. At that time, I was concluding my Master studies and I had a profound interest in continuing my education and doing research in the field of nonlinear economic dynamics. It was immediately clear that there was only a place I wanted to be. It was CeNDEF. After 4 years, this thesis represents the work I did.

This experience was also a structural change in my life since I moved from the sunny Italia to the windy and rainy Netherlands. To be honest, when you get used to the north-european weather (and it takes a while!) it is not bad after all. I remember that shortly after I arrived in Amsterdam, I received a box that became known in the department as the "survival package" filled with typical italian products (parmigiano, caffè, pasta, olio d'oliva, etc.). It was sent by my parents to help me survive the cultural shock. However, I enjoyed the time I spent here. I tried to balance adaptation to the dutch society and conservation of the positive aspects of the italian temper. An outcome of this highly nonlinear process of adaptation/conservation is that I am the most fluent speaker of spaghetti-nederlands, a dutch dialect.

After this short summary of the last 4 years, I would like to thank some people. First of all, the members of the commission for reading the manuscript and for the detailed comments that improved it significantly. In particular, I would like to thank Alfredo Medio for getting me started as an undergraduate student in Venice in the nonlinear economic world.

I would like to thank also my relatives (the family!) for the amazing dinners we had when I was back in Italy. Many thanks also to my friends. Doing this, I will use one of my preferred jokes, giving nicknames to people and translating dutch names in italian.

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Grazie a tutti, Bedankt allemaal,

Sebastiano Manzan (also known as "*Bassie*")