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Political Economy and contemporary Renaissance: challenges and opportunities

Economia Política e o Renascimento contemporâneo: desafios e oportunidades

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Abstract

In times of severe crisis there are emergence phenomena, which are characterized by disruptive rethinking of previous, taken for granted assumptions. The aims of the present text are to explore the role played by the field of political economy scientific production as a relevant contribution to foster the debate about contemporary societies' Renaissance phenomena, at the level of the prevailing cosmogonies that condition political action and thought. The institutional economics school of thought addresses social relations and intersubjectivity as structuring instances that condition what is and what is not possible to be thought, conceived, acknowledged and acted upon. Open inquiry research methodologies help to address the profusion of meanings that emerge from present turbulent contexts. Death and decay are part of living systems natural cycles, giving rise to new forms of growth and to new modes of existence. Modernity and Ancient thought, in Western cultures, created a separation between cosmogonies and Cosmo visions that reject or else that accept determinism and fatalism. Kairos, understood as the quality and existential experience of the passage of time, as opposed to Chronos, the quantitative and sequential idea of time, are critical to contrast deterministic and non-deterministic influences. The crucial issue is that both Kairos and Chronos, both Modernity and Antiquity, and also both deterministic and non-deterministic influences help to explain how crises, individual and collective, institutional and civilizational, and local and global, give rise to novelty, to emergence and to renewal. Such renaissance effect is present in current times.

Keywords: cosmogonies mapping, political economy visual aids, disruptive reasoning Renaissance phenomena

Resumo

Em tempos de crise severa, ocorrem fenómenos de emergência, que se caracterizam por repensar de forma disruptiva os pressupostos anteriores, tomados como certos. O objetivo do presente texto é explorar o papel desempenhado pela produção científica do campo da economia política como um contributo relevante para fomentar o debate sobre os fenómenos renascentistas das sociedades contemporâneas, ao nível das cosmogonias dominantes que condicionam a ação e o pensamento políticos. A escola de pensamento da economia institucional aborda as relações sociais e a intersubjetividade como instâncias estruturantes que condicionam o que é e o que não é possível ser pensado, concebido, reconhecido e acionado. As metodologias de pesquisa de inquérito aberto ajudam a abordar a profusão de significados que emergem dos atuais contextos turbulentos. A morte e a decadência fazem parte dos ciclos naturais dos sistemas vivos, dando origem a novas formas de crescimento e a novos modos de existência. A modernidade e o pensamento antigo, nas culturas ocidentais, criaram uma separação entre cosmogonias e cosmovisões que rejeitam ou aceitam o determinismo e o fatalismo. Kairós, entendido como a qualidade e a experiência existencial da passagem do tempo, em oposição a Chronos, a ideia quantitativa e sequencial do tempo, são fundamentais para contrastar as influências deterministas. A questão crucial é que tanto Kairós quanto Chronos, tanto Modernidade quanto Antiguidade, e também influências determinísticas e não determinísticas ajudam a explicar como crises, individuais e coletivas, institucionais e civilizacionais, locais e globais, dão origem à novidade, à emergência e à renovação. Tal efeito renascentista está presente nos tempos atuais.

Palavras-chave: mapeamento de cosmogonias, recursos visuais da economia política, raciocínio disruptivo, fenómenos renascentistas contemporâneos

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Introduction

Existential dimensions of crises and renewal - and contemporary Renaissance phenomena - have been extensively covered in literature (Fremstedal, 2019; Olssen, 2021). Science and arts, history and technology, theology and mythology, symbolic reasoning and imagination, all show signs of both crises and renewal. Political economy bridges the abstract world of models, methodologies, theories and concepts with the practical world of hands-on real-life existence. Human existence occurs within communities, and communities are sharing spaces of meaning, of signification and of sense-making. In other words, humanity evolves through trial and error, through wishful thinking and the search for self-fulfilling prophecies, which both fail and are re-designed in order to respond and to adapt to new realities. The challenges and opportunities of political economy are the challenges and opportunities of present thought and action capacities. Contemporary political thought underlies the tacit assumption that there is a desirable and universally accepted notion of politics, understanding politics as a vehicle for intrinsic good (Wahl, 2022; Sandel, 2020). For Hannah Arendt, the political represents a place for the enactment and expression of the self in its highest form (Arendt, 2013). Zambrano's poetic rationality captures this political and universal way of relating that is inherent to humans (Gingerich, 2008). Feminine sensitiveness, political awareness and philosophical traditions have to be reinterpreted from critical hermeneutical perspectives in order to highlight the subtle complexities of contemporaneity (Henriques, 2010). In other words, across history, political thought and action aimed at capturing the deepest felt experiences of how humans could organise themselves collectively in order to achieve the best outcomes in terms of livelihoods, lifestyles, attitudes towards life, convictions and perceptions regarding the lived experience (Hay, 2016; Leiter, 2005; Sandel, 2020). The reason for acknowledging the need to continuously produce and share political reflections is the evidence that change, movement and dynamism force or else seduce and attract new positions and new statements that, in turn, capture novel human collective experiences (Crutzen, 2021; Moreno, 2014; Remer et al, 2013). The sections below will cover the Renaissance, regeneration and renewal phenomena; the material expression that is present in arts and sport; the enabling role of artefacts and technology; and the creative tensions occurring in political economy perplexities.

The purpose of this text is to explore current emerging processes of renewal and novelty, characterised by contemporary Renaissance phenomena, and to highlight the role of science, of scientific production and of scientific communities, as the locus of elicitation and formalisation of the *leitmotiv* and the *zeitgeist*, the spirit of the times, of contemporary societies (Garito, 2022; Mumford, 1944). The kernel social role of science in framing present and future reading matrixes of emerging realities is performed by political economy as the scientific field that integrates and further develops the prophetic and creative role of science (Cortina, 2017; Sandel, 2020). Open inquiry is used as a research method that adequately serves the purpose of promoting debate, confrontation and dialogue between paradoxical and ambiguous epistemic and existential positions and options (Bandura, 2007; Castells, 2002; Collier, 2015). Moving from structured to open inquiry is a methodological shift that enables addressing contemporary changes as they unfold (Zion & Mendelovici, 2012; Welzer, 2011). The difficulty of addressing present times complexity and turbulence invites and welcomes explorative research approaches, as is well documented in literature (Fremstedal, 2019; Olssen, 2021; Welzer, 2011).

Diverse themes will be explored that include cosmogonies mapping, political economy visual aids and disruptive reasoning, characterised as active elements that frame the emergence of Renaissance phenomena (Duarte et al, 2021; Wahl, 2022; Kennedy & Engebretsen, 2020). Different perspectives will be explored, including renaissance, regeneration and renewal, and cities, empires and scientific production. These elements are viewed as important items in the open puzzle of contemporary political economy discourses and thought (Han, 2015; Han, 2018; Mang & Reed, 2020; Sandel, 2020).

Renaissance, regeneration and renewal

Attitudes reflect states of being, of evolution and maturation, encompassing singular and collective cosmogonies, that is, the background taken-for-granted assumptions that condition and delimit human thought and action. Certain cosmogonies are probably a prerequisite for the recognition,

identification and acknowledgement of the full depth and breadth of present challenges and opportunities. Sensitiveness and openness towards the unknown may help to trace and track present and future consequences of the scaling of ecological degradation and economic inequality (Crutzen, 2021).

The notion of a Renaissance age in present contexts and in contemporary societies, namely in the university, has been explored in the literature. “The dialogue among representatives of the academic world, the harmonization of higher education and research programs, the students and teachers’ mobility – all of those, represent the unavoidable path to be followed to make intercultural dialogue become part of everyday life.” (Garito, 2022, p. 13). Along with a higher education setting, the sphere of action of political economy similarly shares a multitude of approaches, perspectives, and schools of thought and, consequently, needs to make room for intercultural dialogue on an ongoing basis.

Renaissance phenomena – and the perspective that they enable – are an inspiring instance to reflect upon present reality (Han, 2015; Han, 2018; Garito, 2022). The historical Renaissance movement that occurred in the fifteenth and sixteenth century in Europe, as a revival of Greek Ancient art and thought, and that symbolised the break with Medieval times, and the Baroque artistic movement that reflected an exaggeration of decorative details, which occurred in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, are significant examples of societal transformations that occurred several centuries ago (Stewart, 2016; Williams, 2022). Nevertheless, the traces and characteristics that these social movements represent may help to interpret the turbulence of contemporary societies (Leiter, 2005; Wahl, 2022). The argument is that present times may be interpreted as Neo-Renaissance and Neo-Baroque, for their extreme attention to a saturation of sensorial stimuli and search for renewal, for novelty and for change. The rationale is that there is a continual promise of change and renewal, taking place in dominant discourses, which permanently postpones effective change (Moreno, 2014; Martin, 1996; Remer et al, 2013). It is an ambiguous situation in which eventual access to a varied array of possibilities is indeed met by blockages and dead-ends. The Neo-Renaissance and Neo-Baroque concepts imply a call for rethinking current practices and the options being taken by policy-makers in the name of a brighter future (Han, 2015; Han, 2018). The idea is to use political economy as an open platform through which to interpret societal dilemmas and to refer to the background, implicit and invisible, i.e., the almost caricatured and anecdotal scenario of grandiose megalomania discourses, and vulnerable, limited and frail results (Bandura, 2007; Castells, 2002; Collier, 2015).

The logic behind pornography consumption and substance abuse shares the pattern of saturation of sensorial stimuli, which serves as a metaphor to reflect upon present reality (Wahl, 2022; Wengrow, 2008). Pornographic content is distinct from the burlesque or from eroticism, as it adequately encapsulates stimuli whilst, simultaneously, rejecting or neglecting or denying whatever cannot be regulated, controlled and previously planned according to expectations. Tragically, this same symbolic pattern may be identified in military conflicts, that is, there is an urge to saturate a system of significance, which results in its blockage – and reflects its inadequateness and absurdity; conflicts may be wars, abuse of power, genocide, etc., sharing the fact that they serve a purpose of diversion, distraction and avoiding whatever reality is being presented as escaping the control and regulation of past times (Stewart, 2016). The metaphor of the society of the spectacle illustrates this alienation that explores passiveness and inaction, disengaging political action, citizenship and civic alertness, awareness, sense of dignity, self-respect and self-esteem (Debord, 2012; Moreno, 2014; Remer et al, 2013). The show may go on, as powerlessness, impotence, frustration and loss of sense of purpose becomes ingrained in individuals and groups. “Everything must change for everything to remain the same”; “if you don’t change, time will change you”, are two lines that capture social inertia and resistance to change and also the evidence of the inevitability of change - “Il Gattopardo”, Luchino Visconti (Franco, 2010).

Phenomenological and analytical philosophy represent alternative and opposing – incompatible – epistemic positions that help to trace the paradoxes of contemporaneity (Leiter, 2005; Han, 2018; Welzer, 2011). Whilst analytical philosophy is dominant, and it refers to powerful value-chains – the financial flows and research funding - and supply-chains – the logistics flows and research centres - of scientific production and publication that are reflected upon academic institutions and research units, and also within the formal evaluation procedures that attract and direct public and private funding, the phenomenological tradition represents the poor and almost indigent side of the philosophical family (Han, 2015; Han, 2018). Nevertheless, and more importantly, analytical

philosophy aims at bringing clarity, precision, consensus and descriptive accuracy and homogeneity to that which is already known, acknowledged, recognised and nominated, having in mind the need to classify and to catalogue what is already there, present and visible, on the top of the table. Phenomenological positions, on the contrary, do take into account that there is a table and that there are elements that are positioned in a visible form on the top of the table and, yet, aim at capturing the apparent nature, the perceptive, subjective inner experience, the generative process through which there is the acknowledgement of such experience (Moreno, 2014; Martin, 1996; Remer et al, 2013). Phenomenology addresses the inner world experience, “back to the things themselves”, as Husserl ascertained (Husserl, 1999), whilst logical positivism, as analytical philosophy, aims at clarification and precision of what is already known (Stewart, 2016).

The capacity to attract, to enchant and to puzzle generation after of generation of creative and highly productive scholars, women and men who have described their phenomenological positions and have contributed to what is understood today as this radical, complex and rich philosophical school of thought, is outstanding (Altman, 1987). For this reason, political outcomes, the cultural processes that have delivered them, as a midwifery job, and the livelihoods and first-hand living experiences that have enabled the emergence and blossoming of the cultural and political novelties cannot be recognised, acknowledged and addressed by analytical positions as they are the ultimate example of the paramount power of phenomenological positions not only to grasp reality but to enable and open new spaces and fruitful grounds for future realities (Leiter, 2005; Sandel, 2020). That is, human experiences, the cultural processes and the political outcomes, not only refer to present times opportunities and possibilities but, more fundamentally, address the opening up of new horizons for thought and action (Stewart, 2016). Phenomenological positions address nothing less and nothing more than the precise emergence process of the infinite layers of meaning and the fruitful and fertile grounds through which humans make sense of their living reality on an ongoing basis that is simultaneously singular, unique and unrepeatable and, yet, it is universal, inclusive and integrative (Han, 2015; Han, 2018).

The tension – and incompatible nature – of the theoretical analytical versus phenomenological positions in philosophy is not filled with gratuity and naivety, neither is it inconsequential (Bandura, 2007; Castells, 2002; Collier, 2015). In simple terms, analytic positions serve the purpose of clarifying what has already been defined as being relevant and it does not – and it cannot – open up the exploratory generative process of emergence of relevance or of significance, in cultural, political, social, scientific, technical or philosophical terms (Milhano, 2021; Wahl, 2022). In simple terms, phenomenology is the implicit and tacit informal backstage that is prior to formalised conceptualisation and theorisation, and it is unavoidably present throughout all human creations. The great majority of the final creative stages of artistic, scientific or technological productions uses an analytical approach and methodology, whilst the fuzzy, trial and error, dirty, chaotic, blurred, confusing and perplexing initial stages of creative processes can only be valued, cherished, nurtured and protected through a phenomenological perspective (Moreno, 2014; Martin, 1996; Remer et al, 2013).

If it is assumed that there is a death culture and a waste bias in privileged and abundant settings of contemporary societies, which produces lethargic and alienated political positions, offers poor life experiences and restricts homogeneous, mediocre and shallow thinking and discourse as if there were no alternatives, if this tragic panorama is accepted as valid and plausible, then it is no surprise that phenomenological positions are rejected and neglected, whilst analytical positions are viewed as a safe ground for the perpetuation of privilege and of denial (Leiter, 2005; Wahl, 2022). The same principle applies in other contexts. Concepts such as anti-psychiatry psychiatry, or anti-philosophy philosophy, or positions as of the masters of the suspect, Nietzsche, Marx and Freud, illustrate these tensions (Leiter, 2005; Sandis, 2017). In mental health, the dominance of cognitivist therapeutical positions and the difficulty of acknowledging alternative, heterodox and non-mainstream approaches, from art therapy to bodily and emotional focused work, illustrates the cultural dominance of top-down, command and control, analytical reasoning and rationalisation models. Neurosciences and digital and quantum computing intellectual productions exemplify the fascination with complex systems that are indeed addressed as if they were sets of modular and distributed nodes of data exchange (Crutzen, 2021).

Throughout the evolution of humankind, the role of technology and of knowledge have acquired

different expressions, roles, functions and modes of use – variable in terms of modes of production and consumption (Moreno, 2014; Martin, 1996; Remer et al, 2013). Renaissance, regeneration and renewal are present at all scales and dimensions of human experience, across historical eras and wide apart geographical dispersion. Nevertheless, present times illustrate an intensification of processes that have always been present, unavoidably, yet, today these processes have acquired an expression and visibility that is outstanding. The point is that there are a multitude of examples, in political spheres, in civil societies initiatives and in scientific production that represent a manifestation of novelty and change. Varied research sources witness these emergent processes (Ortiz et al, 2016; Nogueira et al, 2019; Esteves, 2020).

The visibility of the connections between innovations that cross-fertilise and expand new areas of collaboration between actions related to policy making and the academia, have become manifest, yet, are blurred and fuzzy as their borders expand. That is, never before as today has the rate of contamination been so rapid in spreading novelty, yet, this acceleration has unexpected outcomes that need the reinvention of the criteria and definition of innovation. For instance, the emergence of Fablabs and of Makerspaces – one emerging from an academic context and the other from a civil society initiative, but both finding fast-tracks for innovation and social change – illustrates this acceleration and contamination. Civic movements related to ecological concerns have demonstrated a wealth of creative production that includes the exploration of new political forms of governance and of participative decision-making. More impressively, some of these initiatives have managed to gain political mandates in local power structures; and these initiatives have enabled being captured by the radars of large institutional settings, private and public, as innovative case studies that may be studied, replicated and disseminated. Transition Network and Transition Towns are examples of these movements that have emerged from the UK and are now world networks; in the USA, the Regenesis Institute and the Post Carbon Institute, with the influential work of Richard Heinberg, are examples of initiatives that attract collaborators at world level and cooperate informally and formally between other ecosystem's networks. In Portugal, these movements and institutions also occur and there are active offspring that include collaboration in EU funded projects, such as the initiatives Community Climate Coaches and Wiki Commons. Ecological concerned policy-making is well documented in literature (Macedo, 2020; Crowley et al, 2021; Munsell et al, 2021; Henfrey et al, 2023; Henfrey & Ford, 2018; Henfrey, 2018). Within this vibrant and emergent research context, cross-national and transnational perspectives are key (Della Porta et al, 2015). The communities of practice and the global networks capture this universal dimension, whilst communities of place ground thought and action on territorial, circumstantial and historical heritage and on its challenges and opportunities.

Orla Design, in Lagos, proposes eco-social regeneration by activating nature-based processes to enable transitions towards regenerative livelihoods; Origens, in Viseu, explores grassroot and bottom-up community-based collaboration and associativism; and in São Luís, Odemira, Co.re, recently created, is presented as an ecoversity, as an alternative for university-based studying; these are outstanding examples of how big ideas start with baby steps. The area of integral cooperatives, such as Minga, in Montemor-o-Novo, Rizoma, in Lisbon, and of geographical areas dedicated to ecological concerns and the exploration of new forms of community life, such as Tamera, are powerful and rich examples of social change. In Portugal, educational initiatives, such as the Brave Generation Academy; the designer school the Odd Academy, in Lisbon; the evolution of José Pacheco's pedagogic innovations, from Escola da Ponte, from a few decades ago, to Âncora project in Brazil and, presently, back in Portugal with a privately owned project; or else, in Bali, the Eco-school, which attracts young families and digital nomads from the Global North (Pagel et al, 2014), exemplify wide apart examples of novelty, innovation and social change. UMAR, União de Mulheres Alternativa e Resposta, is a feminist activist Portuguese association that promotes social justice and democratic values. SEIES is a Portuguese citizenship promoting NGO that focuses on empowering regenerative work models and urban-rural local-based food systems that are inclusive, diverse and, crucially, effectively denounce patriarchal, paternalistic and misogyny mentalities. Université des Nous and Schumacher College, in Europe, and Towerland, in South Africa, with different scales and goals, are also examples of vibrant and global reaching multicultural, eco-conscious and inclusive initiatives. Even the not new Rollex Learning Centre, in Lausanne, that hosts the MOOC Factory, massive open online courses, is an example of long-lasting and innovative leadership. La Revuelta de las Mujeres en la Iglesia, and the Exeria group, in Galiza, are Spanish eco-feminist-based examples

that have won political and citizenship prizes, in 2023; the Ayuntamiento de Santiago de Compostela Eight of Mars prize, in the category of associations, and the third prize of F. de los Ríos, respectively. Two other Spanish based initiatives promote civic engagement and social justice; MAD Africa is dedicated to promoting African women authors and their literary production from an inclusive, integrative and eco-feminist perspective; and Makum Ceuta advocates for fairer, legal and human rights protection of migrants in the Southern European borders, denouncing racist and xenophobic policies and practices, armed forces abuse, media invisibility and political hypocrisy of public and private discourses.

Applied theatre areas such as Playback Theatre, which originated in a school in New York City and are now spread throughout the world, mainly in the Global North (Pagel et al, 2014), are vibrant examples of the need for active techniques for community building. Contemporary applied theatre modalities may be traced back to the pioneer work of Jacob Levy Moreno and his creation of the theatre of spontaneity (Martin, 1996; Apter, 2003; Remer, et al., 2013; Fernández, 2018). Impromptu, in Salamanca, Spain; Díspar, Teatro Imediato, Inverso, The Iberian School of Playback Theatre and several others in Lisbon, are examples of the high potential for sharing powerful techniques in order to support radical social change. In Latin America, the tradition of spontaneous theatre, Teatro Espontáneo, and the examples of groups such as Psicólogas en Acción y Nómades, with projects such as La Arte Lo-Cura, which manifest the fervorous activity of local and global networks and activities that include therapeutical, educational, social, organisational and political aims and contexts, are spread in Global South and South-South collaborations (Pagel et al, 2014). Theatre of the oppressed, image theatre, forum theatre, legislative theatre, newspaper theatre, or invisible theatre, are prolific and constantly evolving expressions and variants of community based and community building drama applications. These areas of intervention could be illustrated across other means, channels and forms of expression, including music and dance, or sport and nature exploration; nevertheless, the same principle applies, they illustrate the emergence of powerful local and global networks that literally change the lives of individuals and groups by promoting ownership, sense of belonging and global citizenship engagement.

A crucial element that is related to the emergence of community initiatives, of activist groups, and of social and civic movements, is that these have attracted the interests of academia (Fernández, 2018; Bandura, 2007; Castells, 2002; Collier, 2015). Indeed, there is a proliferation of applied research conducted at secondary and higher education settings, including master and doctoral research, which is dedicated to the study of these initiatives – often action-research based and grounded in pilot projects (Moreno, 2014; Martin, 1996; Remer et al, 2013). These examples illustrate varied forms of open inquiry (Zion & Mendelovici, 2012; Debord, 2012; Williams, 2022).

The University of Valencia, in Spain, for instance, offers master training in Playback Theatre. EU funded projects and the offering of new curricula that include expertise on these bottom-up activities is a demonstration of the vitality, leadership and adequateness of these initiatives to point the direction to what needs to change and to what is already changing in society in pioneers' ways. More importantly, still related to the Playback Theatre network, besides the scientific power there is the direct political engagement power, reflected in initiatives in Lesbos, Greece, with the oldest European refugee camp; with Palestine and Israeli initiatives and a Festival that aimed at fostering Palestine suppressed voices; Ukrainian and Russian groups, often in diaspora, that aim at supporting isolated groups; examples in South East Asia, including in South Korea, and in the African continent, in South Africa and also in Northern Africa.

Public sharing of scientific information, the production of adequate policies and the emergence of civil society initiatives come together in varied types and formats, institutionally and technically (Crutzen, 2021). The critical issue is to acknowledge and to value these processes, as open agendas for reinventing society. The majority of these initiatives, however, is not affecting the less privileged and the marginal settings of contemporary societies; in particular, including prisons, reformation houses for youth, migrant and refugee camps, and rural and peripheral urban populations that are invisible in the new and old media, in public opinion and in policy making, and are present in the Global North and in the Global South, yet in this later case, the scale of the inequity tragedy is paramount (Hay, 2016; Wahl, 2022; Pagel et al, 2014). Evaluating the social impact of public policies cannot be an inverted logistics exercise. Science and technology are tools and instruments at the service of humankind and there is no dystopian model that may deny the inherent social and collective nature of scientific production. Consequently, rethinking political decision-making implies rethinking what

is meant – and, moreover, what are the direct and visible consequences of such interpretation (Hay, 2016). In the end, two fundamental questions remain open regarding how a policy will be impactful: firstly, in the name of what principles and, secondly, to the benefit of which groups is it possible to foresee desired change (Leiter, 2005). In other words, there is a culture and a model of rationality that has to be made explicit so that it may be tracked and checked throughout its full arch of developmental stages (Stewart, 2016).

Cities, empires and scientific production

Cities are artificial and cultural outcomes that draw the possibilities' mapping of human and non-human existence in the form of ecosystems and of political regimes and ideological movements. Cities have been present in historical and pre-historical times; cities hold, host, care for, select and divide, through symbols of shared culture and of collective knowledge production and sharing (Wahl, 2022). To hold, to host and to care for, those of our own; to hold, to host and to care for others, for other living species and for the habitats and ecosystem that enable life to thrive and to be able to celebrate and cherish the holding and caring material conditions of that co-creation livelihood and material existence; science and technology, religions and spiritual movements, art and sport industries, political regimes and political action are not the product of cities neither of city dwellers because they represent universal creations (Leiter, 2005; Debord, 2012). Universal creations do not exist on their own as they are the offspring of shared and of social experiences. Social in not opposed to individual; collective, social, communal, shared, participated, distributed, connected, bonded, linked and interlinked means the material communicative flow of inner and outer human existence in the form of territorial organisations, urban and rural (Hay, 2016; Stewart, 2016).

Cities are the ultimate example of community life possibilities that may represent both the emerging stage or else the degrading and self-destructive period of a dying civilisation (Bandura, 2007; Castells, 2002; Collier, 2015). Death and decay are natural phenomena in the material and the cultural worlds; culture is the process of creating language use, new grammars and lexicons, that enable the expression and communication of livelihoods and material existential experiences; a death culture is a culture of death; death cultures are cultural- and socially made artifices and artificial codes of existence; birth, growth, reproduction, decay and death are life cycles of material cultural reified processes that constitute reality, possible and impossible worlds of existence. Cultural outcomes are universal, eternal and self-sustaining processes because they efficiently and effectively master the art and science of integrating, processing and reorienting past drives, impulses and life impetuous in the form of plastic, inclusive and integrative ideas (Arendt, 2013).

The Roman Empire has two phases, the Republic and the Empire – Republican Rome, 510-31 BC and Imperial Rome, until AD 476, the last phase being more abusive and powerful, with the dominant centre and the subordinate peripheries becoming entrenched in symbiotic alliances of the respective privileged elites, the elites of Rome and the elites of the last corner of the empire (Stewart, 2016). The Portuguese Seaborn empire – 1415-1825 –, has two phases, the short initial exploratory stage and then the abusive, deadly, violent and secretive organisation of powerful monopolies (Boxer, 1969), later explored by the Spanish (Parry, 1966, 1990) and the Dutch (Waters, 1966) commercial domains, between 1600 and 1800, known as the two other seaborn empires; for eight years, from 1568 to 1648, the Dutch provinces fought to break away from the Spanish crown, redesigning and enabling the continuation of abusive empires.

The French Revolution has two phases, the 1789 outbreak and the Napoleonic wars and invasions – new ideas spread like wildfire and violent action is activated, which then becomes absolutist and turns into abusive forms of power, as the revolutionary ideas and the violent action are integrated, absorbed, diluted and metamorphosed into imperialistic new-normal, subjecting all to the privileges of a few, within the French borders and across the invaded territories (Stewart, 2016).

In 1776, on the 4th of July, was the Declaration of Independence from the British Empire of what is known today as the United States of America, the Northern America colony that surpassed its imperial master economically and politically in the XIX and XX centuries (Stewart, 2016). In 1975, on the 11th of November, almost two centuries after the 1776 Declaration of Independence of USA, the Angolan state acquired its independence from the Portuguese colonial power, as the over decade

long colonial war helped to bring democratic power and the fall of the dictatorial regime. Two centuries lapsed between the fall of colonial power of the largest of its colonies: USA in relation to the British Empire, and Angola in relation to the Portuguese Empire; the British Empire emerged after, and partly coincided and overlapped with the Portuguese, the Spanish and the Dutch, understood as the Modern seaborne empires (Boxer, 1969; Parry, 1990; Waters, 1966). In other words, although the majority of Portuguese colonies fell from imperial power only half a century ago, there is a gradual, subtle and hard to trace process through which present times neo-imperialistic and neo-colonial realities are identified and acknowledged.

The history of political regimes of North and South and of East and West, from liberal regimes to central government communist and socialist practices, share an apparently similar life cycle pattern (Stewart, 2016; Solnit, 2010; Johnston, 2009). According to this interpretation and working hypothesis, there is (i) the stage of birth and emergence, as a promise of happiness, in the form of a new ideology; (ii) the period of maturity and material inculturation, indoctrination, normalisation and naturalisation of the new social order; (iii) the period of reproducing, replicating, scaling, disseminating and reaching the level of territorial saturation of communicative channels, registers and artefacts, exhausting the ideological map of what is assumed to be universal knowledge and unrefusable values and beliefs, which drive to the limit the extraction of the available material resources and natural and human richness; (iv) the prophecies are self-fulfilled and the promise of happiness is achieved, for the privileged few, yet, the concentration of power is corrosive and path-dependency and locked-in effects imply that ideological death and decay is near; (v) finally, the collapse of the previous dominance and absolutist power gives rise to alternatives and to the emergence of new ideologies.

In satirical ways and in anecdotal scientific and historical evidence, preaching to the converted may be considered the unanimous and consensual socially effective pattern of decision-making; moreover, it may be taken as the unique and yet universal form of power – it has turned abusive and, yet, is able to perpetuate itself (Pérez-Troncoso, 2022; Stewart, 2016). However, from the side of the outcasts and of the underprivileged, the emergence of new promises of happiness, of new lands of milk and honey, and the actual experience that something different is imaginable, conceivable, feasible and possible is an unstoppable tsunami that drives, rides and navigates the waves of historical change. Symbolic, archetypal and ideological thought is reconfigured and novelty emerges (Garito, 2022; Milhano, 2021).

Political thought and action is contemporary political thought and action; that is, whatever the content of the scientific production from the past, in order to ascertain its relevance, past outcomes and interpretations have to be validated and incorporated into present conditions and into circumstantial existential framing; freedom, democracy, censorship or dictatorship have nuances, demands and political commitments that are unique for each context; consequently, for this reason science is itself a work-in-progress and political economy has to continuously confirm and reaffirm its paradigms and epistemic positions (Aronowitz, 2014; Collier, 2015; Haay, 2016).

Indeed, paradigms and epistemic positions are moving targets and only *a posteriori* is it possible to acknowledge them as when in-process and in-making they are inherently and unavoidably volatile, fragile and fuzzy (Han, 2015; Han, 2018; Welzer, 2011). For this reason, debate, dialogue and the confrontation of taken-for-granted assumptions is mandatory in science and in policy-making (Leiter, 2005). Probably one of the most elusive and counter-productive assumptions regarding scientific production is the expectation of a command-and-control approach; when this is the case, then science becomes void, empty and infertile, as a mere reproduction, repetition and reinforcement of past lessons-learned, which may have been adequate in the past but that bluntly misinterpret new contexts, demands and political sensitiveness (Altman, 1987). The consequences of this misinterpretation may become visible in the form of public contestation, of the emergence of counter-cultures and of the vote-with-your-feet phenomena (Solnit, 2010; Johnston, 2009).

Conclusions

The challenges and opportunities of contemporary societies are the open arena where science and technology have been taking the lead, offering unprecedented levels of achievements in terms

of possibilities for humankind (Zion & Mendelovici, 2012). Political economy and contemporary Renaissance highlight the horizon expansion and the symbolic border crossing that is present, available and assessable today, as it is quantifiable, measurable and reckonable across the spectrum of rich and poor, literate or illiterate, in cities or in rural areas, through formal and informal forms of organisation (Stewart, 2016; Mumford, 1944). The presence of powerful ideas and livelihoods, as life experiences, is infiltrated throughout transversal sectors of societies and exists across industries, regimes and varied legal and social forms of organisation (Crutzen, 2021).

That is, Renaissance phenomena are not a trickle-down economy where the wealthier, privileged and more knowledgeable instruct and direct others; quite the contrary, as it is often indigenous and original people's ancient practices and wisdom that illuminates needed action and informs and inspires new livelihoods (Solnit, 2010; Johnston, 2009). The key issue is to identify, to acknowledge and to recognise novelty; without courageous, brave and disruptive tracking and tracing of emergent phenomena, from whatever source and setting it comes from, the power and social change impetus fades away and inspiration turns into impotence, frustration and disempowerment (Leiter, 2005; Debord, 2012). This is the kernel task of political economy scientific production – and of science in general – not only to interpret past and present innovative instances of social transformation but, more fundamentally, to debate, to propose and to offer critical perspectives on future possibilities, opportunities and challenges (Hay, 2016; Milhano, 2021).

The present text aims at exploring current times' worlds of possibilities and of intentionality, often ambiguous and paradoxical, which are present in political economy thought and action. Scientific production in the knowledge field of political economy provides a showcase of implicitly accepted cosmogonies, as a symbolic map of what is relevant, significant, conceivable and feasible (Moreno, 2014; Martin, 1996; Remer et al, 2013). Political economy addresses political thought and action from the perspective of what is already being produced elsewhere, in science in general, and also in terms of practical, objective and lived human experiences. Lived experiences, in political economy, include positive and edifying or negative and self-destructive, individual and collective, territorial and universal, acknowledging the margins, widening the horizons, in an eclectic way, thus producing new knowledge in syncretic integration (Aronowitz, 2014; Mumford, 1944).

The Renaissance, historically, corresponds to a process of emergence of novelty based on what was understood to be the messages, livelihoods and life experiences of Antiquity that represented a rebirth of Naturalisation and a shift in the balance of power of new elites from merchant cities, creating bubbles of wealthier population who travelled and exchanged ideas, fostering new technologies and artefacts, such as printing and the use of gunpowder. Contemporary Renaissance phenomena include a profusion of spiritual production, nature inspired, and an impetus of applied and enabling technology that, together, create new worlds of possibility (Garito, 2022). These emergence processes are present, visible and acknowledged as forms of self-organisation, autopoiesis, creativity and spontaneity, across contemporary societies and within varied and diverse socio, political, economic, scientific, technological and geographical contexts – across territories, both within urban and rural settings.

Political economy visual resources that are available in scientific production, which are then disseminated in the old and the new media and influence and help to determine public opinion and policy-making, witness the baroque nature of present times and of the performativity of images (Duarte, et al, 2021; Kennedy & Engebretsen, 2020). Mannerism and baroque exploit, until reaching exhaustion and saturation, sensorial stimuli and images and vision are but a metaphorical exemplification of the overflow exploration of the lived experience that they convey. This tip over effect of hyperstimulation, which takes place in information overload, for instance, – or in pornography and addiction behaviour, or in formal military conflicts and in genocide – may create counterproductive effects of desensitizing civic engagement and blocking existential connection, leading to political alienation, indifference, denial and rejection.

Nausea, void and abyss may be interpreted as a reflection of the experience of dissociation, disconnection and pathetic absurdity (Fremstedal, 2019; Olssen, 2021). Indeed, existential experience includes the pathetic and absurd effort to try to figure out the meaning of life and this soul-searching exercise is itself part of the narrative of individuals, groups, communities and civilizations. The history of humankind and the lifecycle of individuals is permeated by the midwifery, weaving, gardening, caring, artisanship and catering of whatever is able to frame human existence – to hold

and to contain, and to give a sense of purpose to life's overflow of intensity (Stewart, 2016; Wengrow, 2008). The point is that humans have, undeniably, a direct experience of themselves, of others, of life, of whatever captures their attention and, from this attention, this trigger, something occurs. The process itself, the search and consolidation process, the maturing and transformative process that humans experience, individually and collectively, as inner and outer processes, are constitutive of human realities, of human worlds and of human universes of meaning and of meaning-making.

Political thought and action is the ongoing process of making visible, explicit and formal whatever is latent, implicit and informal in terms of significant human life experiences (Wahl, 2022; Weber, 2013; Jaspers, 1989). For this reason, political thinking is dependent upon creativity, spontaneity, imagination, sensitiveness and drive towards authentic, dense and intense recognition, perception and acknowledgement of human existential life experiences (Pérez-Troncoso, 2022; Fremstedal, 2019; Olssen, 2021). That is, the flow, presence, moment, that may be identified personally and in singular terms is, unavoidably, an ongoing and collective task, work, product and process, intentional, conscious and visible or otherwise.

Crises are periods, events, limit situations, occurrences and happenings where disruptive processes become visible and explicit, forcing the questioning of the previous assumptions, running in parallel in both science and in non-scientific knowledge production (Crutzen, 2021). Zambrano's poetic rationality is critical in this context (Gingerich, 2008). Epistemic turns and paradigm shifts are the end of the line and the tip of the iceberg of these emerging processes (Welzer, 2011). For instance, eco-consciousness and indignity in relation to the rising economic inequality, within cities and regions and across the globe, the fight against climate injustice, aparofobia, the fear of the poor, and the persistence of extreme forms of poverty, these forms of resistance, resilience and contestation emerge and are transformed through severe crises (Han, 2015; Han, 2018). Each new crisis is a signalling of disruptive thinking and action and of the emergence of Renaissance phenomena (Garito, 2022; Sandel, 2020). In contemporary times, scientific production has been prolific in giving a voice, a place and adequate status to the need to reprocess and reallocate resources and the priorities they convey. Political economy and the debate it holds, hosts and cherishes is the engine, the fuel and the vehicle for helping to promote inclusive and just social change, conducive to healthier, safer and fairer life experiences where no one is to be left behind (Bandura, 2007; Castells, 2002; Collier, 2015).

There is a didactic and pedagogical explicit agenda that emerges from Kairos, as the opportune timing in terms of lived experience, and in the trial and error tentatively regenerative effort of escaping determinism in favour of creativity and of spontaneity (Stewart, 2016; Mang & Reed, 2020; Moreno, 2014). Urgency of action and radicality of thought are Renaissance forms of individual and collective lived experience that are to be acknowledged and celebrated today and in the future to come, for present and for future generations (Moreno, 2014; Remer et al, 2013). A self-fulfilling and wishful thinking prophecy may posit for better uses of historical Renaissance technological productions, such as the use of printing and of gunpowder. Indeed, either there are better uses for centenary and for contemporary technology, or else the risk of self-extinction and of the destruction of life on planet Earth may be a click away.

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