

Politics, Institutions and Social Struggles: Beyond Pure Normativism and Strong Institutionalism in Political Theory¹

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Abstract

In this article, I criticize the tendency in contemporary philosophical-political theory to affirm both pure normativism and strong institutionalism as the heart of democracy, denying a political core not only to social classes, but also to social struggles, which define the main social, cultural and political dynamics, institutionalized and non-institutionalized. The association between pure normativism and strong institutionalism leads, on the one hand, to the separation and opposition between normative foundations and social classes and social struggles, as well as, on the other hand, to the institutional monopolization both of political legitimation and social evolution, because institutions exclusively assume the guard, the legitimation and the public boosting of social normativism. Pure normativism and strong institutionalism, in other words, reduce politics to institutional and systemic politics, as they reduce political subjects to institutional legal staffs, as political parties and technical elites, attributing a peripheral role to social classes and social struggles, a peripheral role also to the politicity of social and institutional life. I argue that this harmful tendency of many philosophical-political theories, fundamentally in the spectrum of liberalism and social democracy, which suffer from a historical-sociological blindness, must be substituted with the affirmation of the centrality of social classes as the real political subjects of social evolution, as well as of the centrality of social struggles as the political-normative basis to the definition of institutional designs, social evolution and economic structures.

Keywords

Democracy; Normativism; Institutionalism; Social Classes; Social Struggles.

Introduction

Beginning with a criticism to an imbricated tendency in contemporary political theories, basically in the spectrum of liberalism and social-democracy, which is the correlation between pure normativism and strong institutionalism in terms of understanding, legitimation, framing and evolution of Western modernization, democratic institutions and social-political life, I criticize the abandonment of social classes and social struggles as the empirical, normative and political key to the comprehension, grounding and streamlining of social evolution, of social systems and of political institutions and political subjects. In contemporary liberal and social-democratic political theories (as those of Rawls, Habermas and Giddens), the foundation of the political field and even of the sociological comprehensions of *Realpolitik* are based on a pure normative basis (Rawls, the concept of veil of ignorance and the consequent impartial, neutral, formal and impersonal juridical-political proceduralism) or on the affirmation of the centrality of institutionalism from the standpoint of systems theory (Habermas' and Giddens' notion of social system and also their consequent impartial, neutral, formal and impersonal juridical-political procedural paradigm), in that social classes and social struggles — which define institutional structures and social evolution, and the political *praxis* as well — have no importance and pay no attention to the construction of the theoretical-political positions. As a consequence, normativism and institutions are conceived of as independent and even objectively neutral and overlapped in relation to social classes and their struggles for hegemony, as well as in relation to their counterpoints over time and consequently with conditions to frame and orientate them by institutional overlapping the political subjects of civil society and their struggles, by institutional proceduralism with an impartial, neutral, formal and impersonal dynamics. My argument is that normativism and institutions are not independent of social classes and social struggles as well as they cannot be conceived of as pre-political or over-political structures characterized by an impartial, neutral, formal and impersonal proceduralism which is not linked to and dependent on the political *praxis*, on social classes and their struggles, but they are the *result* of the current social struggles between opposed social classes directed to the conquest of political hegemony.

Therefore, social classes and social struggles are the very political situation and starting point of political paradigms and social theories in the sense that normativism and institutional designs, as the hegemonic understanding, legitimation and application of normativism and institutionalism, gain form from them, and not the contrary. Indeed, the main problem of liberal and social-democratic political theories based on a mixture of pure normativism and systemic or strong institutionalism is the fact that social classes and social struggles are not affirmed as a central epistemological-political subject and way to the understanding of institutional designs and the elaboration of a normative social basis or to the streamlining of political *praxis*. It is the opposite that happens: political philosophies and social theories construct an impartial, neutral, impersonal and formal

normative-institutional basis as condition to the understanding, legitimation, framing and guiding of the social order, institutional designs, political subjects and social struggles — as happens with the procedural juridical-political paradigm assumed by Rawls, Habermas and Giddens. As a consequence, this normative paradigm supports strong institutionalism as a neutral, impartial, impersonal and meta-social epistemological and political institutional basis situated beyond social classes and social struggles and controlling and depoliticizing them by the affirmation of the centrality of such an impartial, neutral, formal and impersonal institutionalism with an unpolitical dynamic-legitimation. Therefore, it is not a surprise that strong institutionalism places the main focus of social evolution on political institutions, removing the centrality of social classes and their struggles as the core of social and institutional dynamics. Likewise, it is not a surprise that institutionalism becomes the only epistemological-political subject of social evolution and institutional structuration, depoliticizing social classes and their struggles, minimizing the importance and perspective of the political democracy assumed by the political subjects of civil society in relation to social systems and their technicians. However, institutionalism goes further; since it monopolizes the normative basis of social evolution and institutional constitution-grounding, it also legitimizes within the institutions or social systems and exclusively from inside by their self-authorized legal staff, the social dynamics, denying the right of social movements and citizen initiatives to participate in the institutional construction and even to substitute political-juridical institutions or overcome them, which implies the depoliticization and technicization of social systems and political institutions. Democracy, in these theoretical-political standpoints, is basically understood as institutionalism, combining with it, exactly because the theoretical-political affirmation of a mixture of pure normativism and systems theory (or strong institutionalism) and the refusal of assuming the notions of social class, social struggle and political hegemony as the basis of theoretical-political developments concerning the process of Western modernization.

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As a counterpoint to liberal and social-democratic political theories concerning the process of Western modernization, it is necessary to reaffirm, against philosophical-political theories based on pure normativism and on systemic and strong institutionalism, the centrality of social classes and of their social struggles to the comprehension of social and institutional dynamics, including the comprehension and hegemony of a kind of political subject and normative social basis which is not neutral, impartial, formal and impersonal in relation to these social classes and their struggles and situated beyond them. In effect, social classes and social struggles do not present the pre-political or over-political character of the institutions and their overlapping with political subjects and their clashes, but the very political condition of institutions, the very fact of the social classes as the real political subjects of institutional-societal constitution, legitimation and evolution. They also show that institutions are not situated beyond social struggles, but are the result of social struggles performed by conflicting and opposed social-political subjects, in the sense that institutions are a matter of class hegemony and a question of permanent social-political clashes. Social classes and social struggles as the key to understanding the political field and institutional designs allow an affirmation of a radical political basis to social movements and citizen initiatives as the alternative *par excellence* to pure normativism and strong systemic institutionalism of liberal and social-democratic political theories, which, in a very imbricated way, define contemporary philosophical-political theory (both on the new left and mainly on the right); and they are the foundation of a problematic comprehension of social-political institutions as independent,

overlapped, technical and depoliticized in relation to social classes and their political clashes, monopolizing the legitimation and achievement of social evolution. Politics is not, firstly, an institutional matter with a technical-logical and unpolitical sense, dynamics and subjects, but a social matter defined by class hegemony — denied by pure normativism and strong systemic institutionalism. Thus, hegemonic normativism and institutional structures are constructed from social struggles between social classes, and not the contrary, in the sense that they are dependent on — and defined by — these permanent social struggles between opposed social classes, becoming, therefore, totally political, totally dependent on political *praxis* and on social classes.

Three concepts used in this article should be briefly clarified. The first is the concept of social class. I use it as an alternative to systems theory's affirmation of the institution or social system as a technical-logical structure, dynamics and subject which is self-referential, self-subsisting, autonomous and closed regarding political *praxis* and social normativity in the sense that a social system as a technical-logical structure-dynamics-subject is unpolitical, overlapped with political subjects and basically characterized as an impartial, neutral, formal and impersonal proceduralism. Likewise, this concept is used as a counterpoint to liberal and social-democratic political theories' anonymity and individualization of the political subjects, which means that they are not macro-subjects, super-subjects who can streamline societal-institutional dynamics in a broad range. In this sense, individualized and anonymous political subjects only perform a short range political *praxis*, so that they cannot assume a notion of social normativity in the name of all society, as they have no legitimacy to realize a direct political *praxis* which overcomes the centrality of institutionalism, its technical-logical constitution, legitimation and evolution and its impartial, impersonal, neutral and unpolitical proceduralism. Here, the objective and macro action is centralized, monopolized and streamlined by each social system as an objective technical-logical structure-dynamics-subject. Now, the concept of social class directly points to the political subjects of civil society, who, as social classes, as super-dimensioned political subjects, effectively construct, legitimize and streamline social evolution. The use of the concept of social class, therefore, has the purpose of criticizing and overcoming a technical-logical, unpolitical and impersonal use of the systems theory's concept of institution or social system as a depoliticized and non-normative subject of institutional-societal evolution, as if such a process of institutional-societal evolution had no politicized and carnality. Second, the use of the concept of social class points to the fact that the collective movements — such as feminism, LGBTT and mainly the working-class, or even other social movements and the pluralistic forms of citizen initiatives — have yet a very important political role as super-dimensioned subjects in terms of confronting, framing and changing the conservative views based on systemic logic, strong institutionalism and on the unpolitical proceduralism as the platform for contemporary politics. The concept of social class, therefore, allows the complete politicization of the social systems' structuration, constitution and evolution as well as the overcoming of strong institutionalism and unpolitical proceduralism, by the affirmation of the civil society's political subjects as the effective political subjects of institutional-societal legitimation, streamlining and evolution.

The second is the concept of social struggle. By this concept, I refer to the current clashes between the political subjects of civil society as the basis of institutional-societal constitution, legitimation and evolution. It is also used as a counterpoint to the formal, impartial, neutral and impersonal proceduralism assumed by liberal and social-democratic

political theories as the groundwork from which social systems and juridical political institutions and democratic political *praxis* are based on and defined. The concept of social struggle implies, therefore, that politics is not a kind of impartial, neutral, formal and impersonal proceduralism overlapped with and unpolitical in relation to current social-political struggles between opposed social classes. It intends to deconstruct strong institutionalism as a consequence of the systems theory's use of the concept of technical-logical institution or social system as an unpolitical and non-normative structure-dynamics-subject with no politicity and carnality. Therefore, the class struggle means that it is the current political clashes between civil society's political subjects which *politically* (and not technically) defines the institutional-societal configurations, dynamics and subjects, which also means the overcoming of both the impartial, neutral, impersonal and formal juridical-political proceduralism assumed by liberal and social-democratic political theories, as the strong institutionalism which is the consequence of that. The third concept is that of politics. By this term, I refer to the correlation between institutionalization and spontaneity, juridical-political institutions and civil society, institutional legal staffs and social movements and citizen initiatives. This term also points to the fact that institutionalism is one part of the general context represented and assembled by democratic political *praxis*. In this sense, political *praxis* is a non-institutionalized arena and *praxis* performed by non-institutionalized political subjects (as social classes from their struggles for hegemony). Here, institutionalism is the last step of institutional-societal legitimation and evolution, but not the most important, not the unpolitical, impartial, neutral, formal and impersonal proceduralism which liberal and social-democratic theories assume as their motto to a radical democratic politics. At least, by the use of the concept of politics, which is linked to the political *praxis* of the political subjects of civil society, with social classes and their struggles for hegemony, politics also means a complete politicization and normative constitution-legitimation-dynamics of the societal-institutional life. For short, by the use of the concepts of social class, class struggle and politics I want to emphasize the fact that, to use Piketty's ideas, all is politics and political

1. Western Modernization, Institutionalism and Political Praxis: On a Theoretical-Political Assumption of Liberal and Social-Democratic Philosophical-Political Theories

The main basis of contemporary liberal and social-democratic political and social theories, as those of John Rawls, Jürgen Habermas and Anthony Giddens, is characterized by the correlation between normativism and institutionalism from a double dynamics: first, assuming systems theory in order to understand, frame and legitimize the constitution, development and present situation of the process of Western modernization, of the dynamics of contemporary Western complex democratic societies; second, the idea that a notion of social normativity for a democratic pluralistic society, which can ground both democratic political *praxis* by the political subjects of civil society and institutional evolution, should be characterized as an impartial, neutral, formal and impersonal proceduralism which is independent of social classes and their struggles for political-normative-institutional hegemony (see Rawls, 2003; Habermas, 2003a, 2003b; Giddens, 1996). Here, institutions and social normativity, which become totally and strongly correlated and mutually-supported, appear as overlapped with these social classes and class struggles, as if they were independent of them, with no politicity and carnality which are given exactly by the presupposition of the social classes and the social struggles

as the core-role of societal-institutional constitution, legitimation and evolution. This correlation between systemic institutions and an impartial, neutral, formal and impersonal proceduralism leads to strong institutionalism, in the sense that institutions conceived of in a technical-logical view centralize, monopolize and streamline from within both their own structuration, functioning and programming over time, as well as the societal dynamics in general and structural aspects. Here, systemic institutions, assuming such an impartial, neutral, formal and impersonal proceduralism, become self-referential, self-subsisting, autonomous and closed regarding political *praxis* and social normativity, as unpolitical and basically instrumental structures and subjects.

Firstly, the hegemonic notion of the process of Western modernization, both on the right (Hayek, Friedman and Nozick, for example) and on the new left (Rawls, Habermas and Giddens, which are my main examples here) is taken from systems theory and signifies the fact of the consolidation of self-differentiated, self-referential and self-subsistent institutions or social systems which acquire a technical-logical or instrumental sense that is non-political and non-normative – as examples of basic modern social systems the capitalist market and bureaucratic-administrative State can be cited. Systems theory substitutes the notions of social class and class struggles with the concepts of institution and technocracy as the bases of institutional-societal constitution, legitimation and evolution, as the motto of institutional-societal dynamics and as theoretical-political platform for thinking, framing and changing the process of Western modernization and modern social systems. Now, what does the systemic approach regarding Western modernization and modern social systems mean? As said above, according to systems theory, the process of Western modernization is characterized by the emergence and consolidation of differentiated, self-referential, self-subsisting and autonomous institutions which particularize, centralize and monopolize specific fields of social evolution, becoming the very field that they centralize and monopolize. Therefore, a modern society is no longer a social, political and normative totality with a very political-normative center, as is the case in traditional societies. Modern societies are structures-relationships divided into many, differentiated, closed and autonomized social systems both regarding each other and in relation to political *praxis* and social normativity. As a consequence of such individualization of modern societies, there is no longer a nuclear political-normative core from which societal-institutional dynamics is constituted, legitimized and streamlined over time. Each social system is the only arena and subject of its own constitution, legitimation and evolution – that is the meaning of the social system's self-referentiality, self-subsistence and autonomy.

Now, what is a social system? It is a technical-logical, totally unpolitical and non-normative structure based on instrumental reason. Its codes, practices and procedures are technical-logical ones. Its internal dynamics is very objective, neutral, impartial and impersonal, fundamentally technical-logical, overlapped to political-normative subjects-practices-values. And, as a consequence, the social system's self-authorized legal staff is composed of technicians and institutional elites that perform an instrumental action as the core of institutional structuration, management and programming. For short, a social system is a technical-logical structure with no politicity and carnality, unpolitical and non-normative, constituted, legitimized and streamlined from an internal, impartial, formal, neutral and impersonal proceduralism which is overlapped with social classes and social struggles, exclusively internal to each social system. Here, it is important to mention that such a model of technical-logical unpolitical, impartial and impersonal procedural structure is

totally opposed to political *praxis* and social normativity in the sense that a social system is only technical, with a programmable, predictable and scientifically objective management, which means that only institutional technicians have the legitimacy to constitute, ground and streamline the internal dynamics of the social system. Rawls, Habermas and Giddens, from this theoretical-political standpoint, use such a notion of modern institution as the basis of their political theories and the understanding-framing-grounding of democratic institutions, linking them with a notion of social normativity and with the participation of social movements and citizen initiatives. However, such link basically means that this kind of systemic institution, that is, a self-referential, self-subsisting and technical-logical structure with an impartial, neutral, formal and impersonal proceduralism, becomes the programmatic-normative arena, methodology and subject from which the political subjects and practices of civil society gain sense and can effectively act politically. In other words, the theoretical-political core of a contemporary democratic society based on the process of Western modernization is the fact that modern institutions – including juridical-political institutions – have a technical-logical functioning and programming that is characterized as an impartial, neutral, formal and impersonal proceduralism regarding the political subjects of civil society; as a consequence, institutions are something different from these political subjects and their struggles, since they are overlapped with social classes and clashes (see Habermas, 2012a, 2012b, 2003b, 1997; Giddens, 2000, 2001).

As an impartial, neutral, formal and impersonal proceduralism and as a technical-logical structure, a social system allows objective measuring, controlling and programming which is not mixed with the politicized-carnality of the class struggles. The social system's unpolitical and non-normative constitution, legitimation and evolution, as its independence, closure and overlapping in relation to social classes and class struggles, enable their scientific framing-orientation and administrative management, from overcoming the obscure, problematic and dangerous use of the concepts of social class and class struggle for political theory and even for political *praxis*. In this sense, the virtues and the challenges of modern societies are characterized by the consolidation of technical-logical social systems based on an impartial, neutral, formal and impersonal proceduralism that autonomizes and closes them regarding political *praxis* and social normativity, rendering them pure technical-logical structures and subjects. For example, Habermas's thesis of the colonization of the lifeworld means that the self-differentiation, self-referentiality and self-subsistence of technical-logical social systems is the main theoretical-political core and sociological-political fact of the process of Western modernization, a core and a fact which cannot be neglected; a positive core and fact in many terms, but, on the other hand, it is from this core-fact that emerge the modern pathologies, which are caused by the social systems' substitution of the normative constitution of the lifeworld with instrumental rationality (see Habermas, 2002; 1997). Again: systems theory is the very core-fact of modern institutions and, if democracy is possible, then it is possible *from* this theoretical-political-sociological standpoint. Now, here is the first point of my reflections: the natural, uncritical and unproblematic use of systems theory to understanding, framing and legitimizing both modern social systems in general and juridical-political institutions and political *praxis* in particular. The consequence is very clear, direct and dangerous for a radical democratic political *praxis*: there is an unpolitical dynamics and a depoliticized subject which is the technical-logical social system itself, independent, closed and overlapped with in relation to social classes and class struggles. Here, inside the technical-logical and impersonal, impartial, neutral

and formal institutional proceduralism, political *praxis* has no place, influence or power. Political *praxis* and social normativity belong to the political subjects of civil society and their arena; on the other hand, social systems are fundamentally technical-logical structures-arenas-subjects with an unpolitical, impartial, neutral, formal and impersonal proceduralism.

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Secondly, contemporary liberal and social-democratic political theories use the impartial, neutral, formal and impersonal juridical-political proceduralism as the basis of their understanding, framing and grounding of democratic political *praxis* and of the correlation between juridical-political institutions and the political subjects of civil society. Now, what does the impartial, neutral, formal and impersonal juridical-political procedural paradigm mean? Why is it the only basis for a contemporary democratic pluralistic society? Its meaning can be perceived by the concept of *complex society* as defining the constitution and dynamics of a contemporary democratic society. The contemporary complex democratic society is characterized — that is the heritage of the process of Western modernization — by the decentralization of all spheres of social reproduction, which become particularized and autonomized regarding each other, so that they are assumed, centralized, monopolized and streamlined by the correlative social system that represents them. In this sense, the process of Western modernization as self-differentiation, self-referentiality and self-subsistence of autonomous, closed and very individualized technical-logical social systems regarding each other and in relation to political *praxis* and social normativity leads to the end of society as a political-normative totality very imbricated in its parts and with a political-normative center from which all societal-institutional dynamics would be managed, legitimized and streamlined over time. From now on, in contemporary complex societies, the individualization and particularization of the social spheres mean that each social system, from a technical-logical standpoint-dynamics-subject, centralizes, monopolizes and closes its specific area of action in relation to others, becoming totally self-referential, self-subsisting, autonomous and unpolitical. Here, the dynamics of every social system is determined and defined from within, from a technical-logical proceduralism assumed by a self-authorized legal staff, beyond the political subjects and clashes of civil society, which renders institutional dynamics and subjects an impartial, neutral, formal and impersonal proceduralism with no politics and carnality. In the same way, the concept of complex society means that, in contemporary societies, we also have the anonymization and individualization of social-political subjects, which lose their super-dimensioned core-role as social classes (see Habermas, 2003a, 2003b). Therefore, there are no longer social classes as political subjects, class consciousness and belonging in these contemporary societies, which means that no individualized and particularized political subject can assume, centralize and streamline a notion of social normativity in the name of all society and perform a direct political *praxis* in relation to juridical-political institutions in the name of all the political subjects of civil society.

Due to these two factors, contemporary societies have the juridical-political institutions as the effective arena and subject of societal-institutional constitution, legitimation and evolution, so that juridical-political institutions become the *medium* between social systems and lifeworld (see Habermas, 2003a, p. 25, 61-62). The first important thing here is that politics continues to be important in terms of societal-institutional grounding and streamlining, but it is no longer the center of society, as it is no longer the instrument from which all societal-institutional dynamics could be framed, legitimized and changed (see

Habermas, 2003b, p. 25). Politics, as Habermas said, is one social system among others, not the principal or the more important, so it is in the same place as other social systems, each one of them with particular logics of functioning and programming, each one of them very particularized, individualized and closed, self-referential and self-subsisting regarding the others. The second important point is that, in the moment that social classes as macro-political subjects no longer exist, institutionalism assumes the role of a macro political-normative arena and subject of societal-institutional constitution, legitimation and evolution, as said above (see Habermas, 2003b, p. 23). What kind of institutional dynamics is possible to be sustained in a society characterized both by technical-logical, self-subsistent and self-referential social systems and by individualized, particularized and anonymous political subjects? A kind of political dynamics and *praxis* that is independent of and overlapped with any possible particular and anonymous political subject — as is the case, for instance, of John Rawls' veil of ignorance. In this case, only an impartial, neutral, formal and impersonal juridical-political proceduralism can enable, ground and streamline both the juridical-political institutions and the political subjects and *praxis* of civil society, the correlation between institutionalism and political spontaneity. From such an impartial, neutral, formal and impersonal political institutionalism, the societal-institutional dynamics and evolution gain form and are realized. This means that the political subjects of civil society have a very political-normative importance, but they have a secondary political-normative role in relation to institutionalism and institutional arena, values, procedures and legal staffs, so that institutionalism and institutionalization become the fundamental *medium*-subject-procedure-value to the societal-institutional constitution, legitimation and evolution.

Now, two problematic points arise from here. First, juridical-political institutions are blocked in their action by the self-referentiality and self-subsistence of the other social systems in general and the capitalist market in particular; juridical-political institutions are blocked and framed by the technical-logical constitution, legitimation and evolution of social systems. Here, institutional politics and spontaneous political *praxis*, institutional legal staff and the political subjects of civil society cannot directly intervene from a normative-political basis-*praxis* into the technical-logical, self-referential and self-subsisting dynamics of functioning, programming and management of the unpolitical and instrumental social systems, as they cannot substitute technical-logical elites for political-normative subjects. Second, even the juridical-political institutions have a systemic constitution, legitimation and evolution. Juridical-political institutions are the *medium* between social systems and lifeworld, which means that they are systemic and normative-political. The juridical-political institutions' normative constitution means their link with and rooting into the civil society's normative-political arena, *praxis* and subjects. The juridical-political institutions' systemic constitution and functioning signify their technical-logical core-role, as their self-referentiality and self-subsistence (which is not stronger than capitalist market, of course) regarding the political-normative arena, *praxis* and subjects of civil society. Therefore, juridical-political institutions have a very problematic ambiguity that undermines, in my opinion, a model of radical democracy: they are democratic, but not totally so; they are political, but not totally so; they enable and fomentation social participation and criticism, but a partial social participation and criticism. Similarly, as said above, they are framed, determined and blocked by the self-referentiality, self-subsistence, closure and technical-logical constitution of social systems, so that there is no possibility or legitimacy to a direct radical political *praxis* into these unpolitical social systems. And they are an impartial, neutral, formal and

impersonal proceduralism which highly depoliticizes both the institutional internal dynamics, practices and subjects, and the normative-political arena, *praxis* and subjects of civil society. As a consequence, political *praxis* from civil society's spontaneous political subjects cannot enter these juridical-political institutions, just as social movements and citizen initiatives cannot substitute the institutional legal staff in terms of grounding and orienting institutional-societal dynamics and evolution. In both cases, the technical-logical constitution, functioning and programming of social systems and the juridical-political institutions' impartial, neutral, formal and impersonal juridical-political proceduralism, the institutions appear as overlapped with social classes, social struggles, counterpoints and hegemony, as if these institutions were independent, autonomous, closed and totally impartial regarding them. The consequence is very clear: by using systems theory and the impartial, neutral, formal and impersonal juridical-political proceduralism to respectively comprehend-frame the process of Western modernization and to ground-streamline a model of radical democracy for contemporary complex democratic societies, liberal and social-democratic political theories assume a very depoliticized core-role, directly or indirectly pointing to the correlation between strong institutionalism, systemic logic and unpolitical proceduralism as the basis of institutional-societal constitution, legitimation and evolution. Here, the only possible political *praxis*, both institutionalized and non-institutionalized, is the reaffirmation of the frontiers between social systems and the lifeworld (as Habermas proposes — see Habermas, 2002, p. 501-507), but not the overcoming of the technical-logical core-role of social systems for political-normative *praxis*, nor the substitution of the institutional technical-logical elites for social classes or the substitution of the unpolitical institutional proceduralism for social struggles as key-concepts and subjects for institutional-societal understanding, framing and changing.

2. Beyond Pure Normativism in Political Theory

Social struggles are the core of democratic dynamics and, therefore, they are the starting point to understand the fact that democracy is not a complete social-cultural world, nor a pure institutional structure defined by an impartial, neutral, formal and impersonal proceduralism performed by institutional legal staffs which enable democracy itself and its consequences, like equality, liberty and justice. Indeed, democracy cannot be understood as a final stage of sociability, in particular of a modern sociability, or a pure, automatic and independent institutional arrangement, *but as the condition to it*, the way marked by no foundations to the power, to the social-cultural structuration and even to the institutional organization, which means, firstly, that institutionalism is a consequence of the political *praxis* of the social subjects and, secondly, that the permanent inclusive social participation and social struggle is the core of democratic *praxis* (see Rancière, 2014). In this sense, democracy is not pure normativism, nor strong institutionalism, but, in the first place, a very political *praxis*, an intense social struggle between social classes — and, then, democracy can only be understood because of these social struggles, because of the social-political subjects, and not because it sustains a universal normative paradigm or because it is an institutional arrangement that enables social evolution, popular participation and political legitimation. In my point of view, a great problem involving contemporary liberal and social-democratic philosophical-political theories regarding Western modernization in general and democracy in particular consists in a separation between, on the one hand, a conception of normativism or epistemological-moral universalism which ensures criticism, intervention and integration, and, on the other hand, empirical clashes and political-cultural subjects and classes.

Even if it has resulted from these empirical clashes between opposed social classes, the normative basis is separated from daily social-cultural dynamics and concrete political subjects, allowing a neutral, impersonal and impartial point of view that is capable of judging social struggles and political claims advocated by different individuals and social-cultural groups. Yet, the fact is that there is a radical separation between epistemological-moral universalism and social subjects, in that democracy is understood as an ideal of epistemological-moral universalism subsumed and assumed by institutionalism, by a kind of institutionalism which is an impartial, neutral, formal and impersonal proceduralism regarding social classes and social struggles, overlapped with, independent of and autonomous in relation to them. This ideal serves as an *extra-classes* normative paradigmatic basis or as a *normative umbrella* that can orientate and judge impartially social conflicts, plural political subjects and all claims directed to political institutions, as it can ensemble impersonally all of these political-normative subjects-matters-values, so that juridical-political institutions become the basis and the subjects of legitimation, framing, validation and guiding of both social classes and societal-institutional dynamics. The democratic normative basis, that is, the epistemological-moral universalism, therefore, is not to be confused nor associated with real, empirical subjects: in the first place, it is overlapped with empirical political subjects — formal, impartial, neutral and impersonal concerning these practical political subjects, as said above. That condition (the separation between normative foundation and empirical classes and struggles) is the theoretical-political core to enable an institutional objective point of view to analyze all of these political subjects and social-cultural claims, as their social struggles. There is not a direct political subject that can assume the democratic normative basis as its own basis, in the same way that there is not a direct association between a specific political subject and democracy in a wide sense or the democratic political content, *praxis* and institutions — the democratic normative basis is always independent of specific political subjects (all and no one can use it), as well as it is, in the first place, very abstract to embrace all contents and, of course, all subjects from institutionalism.

So what does the democratic normative basis as *extra-classes paradigm* or as an impartial and impersonal *normative umbrella* mean? These expressions should be clarified. I use these two concepts to refer to the fact that a radical separation between democratic normative basis and specific political subjects (as contemporary liberal and social-democratic philosophical-political theories do) implies the affirmation of this democratic normative basis as the real core of democracy and its institutions. Democratic normative basis and institutions are the real content and political subjects of society, and their dynamics represent the true heart of democracy, but exclusively from this distant and even too close normative ideal centralized and monopolized by institutionalism as their core (I repeat: all and no one can assume it). Then, the democratic normative basis assumes a very abstract and large breadth, beyond any political subject or social class. That, according to Habermas, is the condition — the only theoretical-political condition — to an objective judgment concerning social claims and political actors; likewise, in Rawls's political liberalism, this (the veil of ignorance) is the very basic and initial condition to the foundation of an impartial, neutral, formal and impersonal juridical-political proceduralism which founds institutions that are independent of and overlapped with class struggles and hegemony. In other words, the starting point and epistemological-political-normative basis of the liberal and social-democratic political theories is an unpolitical procedure which erases the class belonging, the politicity of the subjects and their confrontations in order to ground not only an impartial, neutral, formal and impersonal paradigm which

serves all and could be used by all, but also to ground impersonal and objective juridical-political institutions which can centralize, monopolize and streamline this impartial, neutral, formal and impersonal juridical-political proceduralism. So who has the last word on these *objective judgments* and on this *impartial and impersonal proceduralism*? Political and juridical institutions, that is, political parties and courts as institutions' self-authorized legal staffs have the last word (cf.: Habermas, 2012a, p. 587; 2003a, p. 11, e p. 20-25; Rawls, 2003, §6, p. 20-25). I will return to this problem of institutionalism based on and streamlined by an impartial, neutral, formal and impersonal proceduralism later. For now, what interests me is the fact that the democratic normative basis no longer belongs to the political subjects and social classes as their construction, but only and directly to political-judicial institutions, in the first place. The democratic universal is the same as these *political-judicial institutions, their internal dynamics and legal actors*.

The democratic normative basis as an epistemological-moral paradigm or as a normative umbrella has the potentiality to embrace all social-cultural matters and groups, as well as all political subjects. Therefore, democracy is universal itself, a normative-cultural basis and an institutional structure that ensures wide political participation, general cultural recognition and full social inclusion – as if it is a final stage, a concluded stage, or basically an institutional arrangement that must be practically performed, or even if this normative ideal has no practical implications in terms of class struggles (the important point is that objective ideal as the key to democratic evolution and legitimation). Such independence from specific social classes, political actors and empirical contextualization supplies the power of judgment for that democratic normative basis assumed by institutionalism, because, in the first place, it has the capability to represent, in a neutral and impartial way, all social interests and political subjects. In many forms, therefore, the democratic normative basis is not political and has no political link with specific social classes or social movements. Its neutrality, impartiality and impersonality are non-political, meaning that it can serve to the legitimation and justification of the social struggles for all groups, as it could be assumed by all social groups in their *praxis* and social claims to other social groups and institutions.

Indeed, not only is that democratic normative basis non-political, but also extremely uplifting in relation to the radical politics, in the sense of being averse to the legitimation of social struggles and specific political subjects. The separation between an ideal democratic normative basis – located inside political-judicial institutions and overlapped with the epistemological-political subjects and clashes of civil society – *versus* social classes and their struggles for hegemony implies the depoliticization of the public sphere and its social clashes and the depoliticization and technicization of the institutions, leading to strong institutionalism (that is, the institutional centralization, monopolization and streamlining of institutional-societal legitimation and evolution from a technical-logical standpoint managed by institutional legal staffs). It implies even the negation of the public sphere as a political field, which means, as a consequence, that political-judicial institutions centralize within themselves the core of politics, all the political possibilities, powers and subjects. Then, democracy acquires merely an institutional dynamics, restricted to the internal rules of political-judicial institutions and their political subjects, beyond any social participation (which has a merely secondary and peripheral role): democratic evolution is transformed in a passive, neutral, impartial and peaceful – because institutional, associated with an impartial, neutral, formal and impersonal proceduralism – process of legitimation and construction, covering the real

space and political actors of social evolution, that is, respectively, the public sphere and the social classes. Institutionalism, which is the result of pure normativism, assumes the performance of social evolution, withdrawing the political power of civil society, becoming a technical-logical field, practice, matter and subject, depoliticized and depoliticizing civil society's dynamics and subjects. Therefore, democracy, conducted by institutionalism, subsumed by it and directly associated to it, centralized on institutionalism, is a movement with no social struggles and no social classes, with no politics, characterized by non-politicization: there is no possibility of social-political conflicts in institutionalism, because political-juridical institutions are the universal normative basis-subject — impartial, neutral, impersonal, completely objective, located beyond social classes and social struggles, overlapped with them.

And, of course, democratic evolution is not an automatic or natural process, nor is it a closed and pure form of institutional dynamics — it is not just that, nor principally institutional logic; democratic social evolution is not a spontaneous, neutral, impersonal and impartial movement, like *laissez-faire* (which is a fantasy even in economic terms). Politics is *political praxis*, the basis of democratic evolution, social structuration and institutional designs. Democracy is not a spontaneous, neutral, impersonal and impartial proceduralism centralized, monopolized and managed from an aseptic and pure and technical institutionalism and by its self-authorized legal staffs overlapped with and independent of civil society's political dynamics and subjects, but essentially a political *praxis* — and a question of social classes and political struggles. Thereby, what appears as the core of democratic evolution and institutional constitution, as I am saying, is politics streamlined by social struggles guided by conflicting social classes (and not a pure normativism and strong institutionalism). Social groups can indeed assume a democratic normative basis — as John Rawls, Jürgen Habermas and Axel Honneth suggest — as the epistemological-moral foundation of their struggles for recognition (it shows, according to them, the centrality of the democratic normative basis), but *it is the social struggles performed by political subjects* that are the main aspect of this political movement, and not the normative ideal for itself and its consequence; the aseptic, pure and technically objective institutionalism. Social struggles and class hegemony, and the political *praxis* of social subjects, make the institutions, social stratification and cultural contents. These social struggles found the democratic normative basis and streamline it through time. The tense correlation that emerges here moves democratic social evolution and streamlines institutional constitution in the sense that all political subjects assume a normative basis for the justification of their struggles and at the same time strengthen it: in other words, democratic evolution is always a social dynamics that depends on the political subjects and social struggles, so that the political *praxis* and conflicts for hegemony of social classes are the basis of societal-institutional constitution, legitimation and evolution over time. A critical social theory which intends to ground a critical social analysis and emancipatory democratic political *praxis* cannot dismiss or abandon that point.

Therefore, there is no sense in separating a democratic normative basis, social classes and social struggles, because empirically it is exactly these classes and struggles that construct or maintain a normative core of democracy through time. The struggles for hegemony assumed and streamlined by social-political subjects or classes effectively constitute the epistemological-political-normative substratum of societal-institutional constitution, legitimation and evolution, and this means the non-sense of the theoretical-political affirmation of the impartial, neutral, formal and impersonal proceduralism as

core-role of institutionalism itself, as much as it is a theoretical-political misunderstanding the notion of institution or social system as a technical-logical sphere which is self-referential, self-subsisting and autonomous regarding political *praxis* and social normativity and the epistemological-political subjects of civil society, as advocated by liberalism and social democracy. The fact that democracy is a permanent social, political and cultural construction must warn us that daily life is the only basis to the construction of social normativity, which means, in this case, that there is no separation between ideal and empirical, or between democracy as a normative concept and social classes and social struggles, between institutions and social classes and social struggles. Such a correlation defines what democracy is and what is the democratic range and consequences. Such question allows us the following conclusion against pure normativism and strong institutionalism assumed by liberal and social-democratic political theories: the democratic pathway and the hegemonic sense of democracy are defined by social struggles between social classes as macro-political subjects that assume a specific normative basis, which gradually institute a normative-political-juridical framework from civil society to institutions. This unforgettable Marxist teaching is important to overcome the nefarious tendency to associate pure and simple democracy, normativism and institutionalism, in a manner that strongly separates the normative basis and the daily political subjects and social struggles.

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There is no universal paradigm like pure, impersonal, technical institutional and abstract democracy, because democracy is not a final stage or an impartial, neutral, impersonal and very objective institutional design, nor is it a complete social-cultural world defined by institutional logic and structuration, assumed, centralized, monopolized and streamlined by institutions; democracy is always an unfinished result, always in need of implementation by social classes and political clashes. Normative conquests can be destroyed by conservative forces, progress can be turned into regression. In the same way, there is not *the* normative, impartial, impersonal and neutral basis, located beyond social classes and their struggles, because it is resulted from hegemonic social, cultural and political subjects, their clashes and counterpoints. So, the normative content of a democratic society is not only *constructed from social struggles and conflictive social classes*, but *also maintained by them*: a permanent social struggle and political subjects that assume democracy as their own project of life and struggle are needed. Only in this way it is possible to found and develop a democratic society, its institutions, social structures and normative codes. Thereby, social struggles are the secret to the maintenance or change of the *status quo*. And, then, democracy can only be understood in the real clashes, as effective social struggles, because normativity (as a pure code, without political subjects or social classes) can be ideologically used by all social classes, serving many purposes, and not only justice – normativity is not independent on social classes that assume it as their theoretical-political basis. In particular, it cannot be centralized in *neutral, impartial, impersonal and very objective institutions* as if they were independent of, overlapped with and pure in relation to political subjects and social struggles. The *praxis* is the real place of social evolution and normative construction, that is, the social classes and their clashes are the core of societal dynamics. In this sense, justice is a social construction and the social clashes are the pathway to the victory of a specific form of sociability and institutional design. This basically means that the social classes are the effective epistemological-political-normative subjects, and not the impartial, neutral, formal and impersonal procedural institutionalism. In this sense, political *praxis* is the core of institutional politics, as the social struggles are the arena from which institutionalism gain form,

legitimation and streamlining over time. That is the starting point and the methodological-programmatic role of political theories in their understanding, framing and legitimation of the process of Western modernization and, here, of contemporary democratic societies.

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Normativism without social classes and social struggles is a pure state or a pure form of politics; it is politics with no historical-sociological linkage; it is a pre-political – therefore non-political – point of view. Likewise, strong institutionalism, founded on pure normativism and its separation from daily life as authentic political life, is the reduction of politics to bureaucratic and technical politics, assumed by political parties and technocracy. In that intrinsic link of our current societies (pure normativism and strong institutionalism), politics is reduced to a simple institutional-bureaucratic movement whose objective is the maintenance of systemic conditions to the hegemony of political-juridical institutions and their specific actors – political parties and economic oligarchies. In this sense, politics is an internal institutional procedure with bureaucratic norms and legal political subjects that are too distanced from the common citizen and social movements. The radical separation between a democratic normative basis and the specific political classes (holders of common interests) prevents the performance of a radical politics that can confront institutions and their self-subsistent and self-referential characters, closed to broad popular participation and to a radical and direct politicization. Likewise, pure normativism and strong or systemic institutionalism erase the social classes, their struggles, hegemony and counterpoints as the effective political subjects of societal-institutional constitution, legitimation and evolution, depoliticizing both social classes and social struggles, as institutional structuration, grounding and dynamics. So, a radical politics is located beyond pure normativism and it is not rooted in the internal institutional proceduralism conceived of by systems theory as a self-referential, self-subsisting and autonomous internal institutional proceduralism which is non-political and non-normative, just technical-logical. Indeed, a radical politics has the objective of destroying self-subsisting and self-referential institutional structures that only serve political parties and economic oligarchies – a new characteristic of our democratic societies, that is, the deep imbrication of strong institutionalism, political parties and economic oligarchies based on the ideological discourse of institutional monopolization, centralization and streamlining of democratic normative basis, similarly to the use of systems theory by liberal and social-democratic political theories in order to conceive of modern social systems or institutions, that is, here, the understanding of these modern social systems as technical-logical structures with an internal, self-referential and self-subsisting proceduralism centralized and monopolized by institutional legal staffs. And a radical politics must confront this contemporary attitude-assumption of liberal and social-democratic philosophical-political theories (that directly or indirectly contribute to the legitimation of strong institutionalism): their individualization of political subjects and their refusal of social classes and social struggles as paradigmatic concepts to social theory.

3. Beyond the Individualization of Political Subjects

Contemporary political theories – especially liberal and social-democratic political theories – individualize political actors and political problems and clashes. They refuse to conceive of political super-subjects, as social classes, and, actually, they consider this concept an anachronism; besides, they reject a structural perspective on political matters, since it presupposes a systematic view of society, institutions, and, as I have been arguing,

political subjects (see Rawls, 2000, § 11, p. 64-69; Habermas, 2003b, p. 25, e p. 105-106; Giddens, 2000, p. 12-15; 2001, p. 36-37, p. 46, p. 62). Contemporary democratic politics, according to these political theories, concerns the progressive individualization of political subjects, social-cultural problems, and, at last, all social struggles directed to politics and institutions. Likewise, contemporary Western democratic societies lose a totalizing political-normative structuration and functioning in the sense of a complete and consolidated individualization and particularization of all social fields and their correlative social systems or institutions: from now on, contemporary democratic Western societies are not political-normative totalities very imbricated (politically and normatively) in their parts, which means that, as will be argued next, there is not a political-institutional societal center, a core from which all social-institutional dynamics could be programmed, framed and conducted. It is not the case, of course, that the very institutions do not represent a structural dimension and a macro-action that define the processes of socialization and individualization; in fact, according to Rawls and Habermas, for example, the core of society can be defined as the *basic structure of society* (Rawls) or *social systems* (Habermas), meaning that they have not an individual application, but a *social* role. The question is that these philosophical-political theories (specifically those of Rawls and Habermas, as cited) do not associate *institutions and social classes, but institutions and individual political subjects, institutions as technical-logical spheres-subjects with an impartial, neutral, formal and impersonal proceduralism, institutions as self-referential, self-subsisting, autonomous and closed structures-dynamics-subjects*. Indeed, according to Rawls and Habermas, social institutions are particularized in the sense that they centralize and monopolize specific fields of social reproduction with a very specific technical-logical functioning and programming, which also means their self-referentiality, self-subsistence and autonomy regarding political *praxis* and social normativity concerning the society as a normative-political totality which links and streamlines — as it is linked and streamlined by — the dynamics and political-normative subjects of social systems.

Now a problem emerges from such individualization and impersonality of both society (which is no longer a political-normative totality, losing an institutional political-normative center) and social systems or institutions: the fact that it is impossible to explain the institutional, political and economic crisis or directions from this association between institutions and *individual* political subjects — because these kinds of crisis or social-political directions are *structural* crises and directions, broad movements, not an individual crisis or direction, nor a particular and short range action. Similarly, the theoretical proposal of explaining institutional constitution, legitimation and evolution, as its social-political dynamics and impacts, from an impersonal, impartial, neutral and formal proceduralism renders such a kind of institution totally unpolitical, technical-logical, as if it was overlapped with the clashes between opposed macro-social classes. In the moment that the intrinsic relationship between institutions or social systems and social classes is lost, it becomes difficult to explain why and even how our social world, our national and international market, our political institutions, etc., take a specific pathway or lead to social reforms that embrace and involve all people, all workers, all citizens, and so on. Therefore, the individualization of political subjects leads to two theoretical-political problems: it erases the absolutely intrinsic link between institutions or social systems and social classes and it reduces the theoretical-political analyses to micro-analysis, particularized analysis, losing their structural theoretical-political perspective, and this obscures the fact that systemic dynamics or institutional movements depends on struggles involving social classes, and not individual political subjects, in the sense

that systemic dynamics and institutional movements have a large and very totalizing range. They are political-normative, not an impersonal, impartial, neutral and formal proceduralism with no politicity and carnality — as a consequence, there is not a technical-logical institution which is a self-referential, self-subsisting and autonomous structure managed exclusively from within by a self-authorized legal staff, beyond and overlapped with social classes and social struggles. That is the very political sense of a critical social theory which is at the same time a radical democratic political *praxis* directed against strong institutionalism.

Another theoretical-political consequence of such individualization of political movements and political subjects is the centrality of political institutions and their separation from specific social classes and structural social struggles. Institutions are conceived of as independent regarding particular political subjects and social classes, as well as they have no direct link with social struggles. Institutions have a systemic dynamics, that is, an autonomized, self-referential and self-subsisting logic which is internal to the very institutions. Now, what does the fact that any institutional movement or crisis is fundamentally a systemic problem, not a question of social class or hegemonic class or even social struggle, mean? What can be seen here is that, in the liberal and social-democratic philosophical-political theories which individualize political problems and political subjects, it is necessary to assume an institutional view in a double sense: institutions are the core of social evolution, a core with no carnality and politicity, constituted, legitimized and streamlined from a technical-logical standpoint, practice and subject, and they are independent of and overlapped with social classes and political subjects; any social problem or institutional crisis is basically a question of technical institutional mechanisms and technical subjects — these systemic mechanisms are merely technical mechanisms with no political content or class association, as institutional subjects are basically technical-logical staffs with no political-normative association (the institutions' basis of functioning and programming are technical-logical or instrumental mechanisms, values, practices, codes and staffs, and their purpose is fundamentally the institutions' self-subsistence over time with no roots or link with the social reproduction and *status quo*). A surprisingly non-political comprehension emerges from the individualization of politics, political institutions and political subjects: the fact that institutional crises — as a market crisis or a political crisis — are merely a problem in the internal and self-referential logic of social systems or institutions that is blocked and even destroyed by the use of political-normative values, *praxis* and subjects which are external to the social systems' technical-logical constitution, legitimation and evolution and their self-referentiality and self-subsistence. In the understanding of Western modernization and modern social systems from the perspective of systems theory, there is an unsurpassable barrier and opposition between technical-logical institutions and political *praxis* and social classes, in the sense that institutions are technical-logical structures with technical-logical procedures and self-authorized staffs. Here, any political-normative intervention performed by social classes destroys the social systems' technical-logical structuration, functioning and programming. Now, the only sense in politics is to emphasize this frontier between social systems and the lifeworld, not to perform a direct political-normative intervention into the social systems. In this situation, what is politics good for? For the self-preservation of social systems and political institutions, of course!

This problem can be perceived in Habermas's theory of modernity. The Habermasian separation between social systems (like administrative bureaucratic State and capitalist

market) and lifeworld has two intentions: to explain Western (European) modernization from a dialectics between culture (normativity) and institutions (technical-bureaucratic rationalization) and to use these two concepts to understand contemporary *Realpolitik*, explaining nowadays social evolution, institutional designs and political clashes. Modernity emerges, on the one hand, as a universalist culture; on the other hand, it is marked by the consolidation of many social systems, specifically the State and the market, which have intrinsic, internal, autonomous and self-referential logics of reproduction and development. In the Habermasian theory of modernity, modernization is initiated and streamlined by a tension between systemic dynamics (social systems) and normative reproduction (lifeworld), in the sense that systemic dynamics embraces not only its specific field of reproduction, but also all the lifeworld – here emerge modern pathologies (see Habermas, 2012a, p. 590; 2012b, p. 278, e p. 355). Now, in both cases, Habermas substitutes a political explanation of modernity/modernization with a systemic explanation of the structuration of institutions, as well as he substitutes social classes as political subjects with the institutions or social systems as the central (and technical) subjects of modern societies and of the process of modernization (i.e., the totalizing and global expansion of cultural-economic modernity) – that is the consequence of systemic theoretical approach of Western modernization, which means the depoliticization of the concept of Western modernization in general and of the social systems in particular.

According to Habermas's theory of modernity, modern pathologies are caused by an excessive growth of systemic logic of market and/or State in relation to the lifeworld, in that their internal technical-logical reproduction needs to consume all forces and normative values of the lifeworld. There are no political subjects or political causes here, but the very simple systemic subsistence which is technical and impersonal. Social systems have an internal, autonomous (regarding the normative constitution of the lifeworld) and self-referential logic, and sometimes their logic invades and colonizes the lifeworld. Unfortunately, it happens; and, when it happens, we can correct it, but it is just this kind of technical reform that we can perform in order to emphasize and reconstruct the frontiers between social systems and lifeworld. We can perceive, in Habermas's explanation of modernity's constitution and pathologies, a pure and strong systemic explanation, very depoliticized, in the sense that political theory and political subjects are left aside, that is, they are not necessary for the understanding and transformation of Western modernization. Modernization is, in the first place, a question of systemic social dynamics, as of the technical-logical understanding and management, and Habermas assumes this theoretical-political starting point as the key for the comprehension of modernity/modernization, including for discussing the political possibilities opened by modernity/modernization. When politics and political subjects appear, they have a secondary role, determined and restrained by systemic logic, by technical-logical, non-political and non-normative constitution of the modern social systems. This means that it is the systemic logic or institutional dynamics that determines all the movements of politics and all that we can think and perform politically, as much as it is the social systems as technical-logical structures that become the fundamental epistemological-political subject both of their own constitution, legitimation and evolution and of societal dynamics as a whole (cf.: Habermas, 1997, p. 221-222).

We can perceive this Habermasian position with a clearer perspective in his work *Between Facts and Norms (Faktizität und Geltung, 1992)*, which I consider *the theoretical-political consequence of The Theory of Communicative Action (Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns, 1981)*. Indeed, in *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas assumes the systemic

explanation as the core to the understanding of Western modernity/modernization, consequently refusing both social classes and social struggles – and the political clashes streamlined by these social classes and their social struggles – as theoretical-political keys to the explanation of modernity/modernization; now, in *Between Facts and Norms*, it is exactly a systemic comprehension of modernity/modernization that is the basis of the construction of the political-juridical procedural paradigm and to its application to contemporary democratic evolution. So what is the starting point of Habermas's *Between Facts and Norms*? It is, firstly, the consolidation of different, autonomous and self-referential social systems, all of them (and especially the market and the State) provided with their own logic of functioning and programming; it is also, secondly, the individualization of political subjects, which cannot be conceived of anymore as social classes; and it is, thirdly, the strong institutionalism which monopolizes the core of social evolution and political legitimation (see Habermas, 2003b, p. 21).

What is the consequence of the Habermasian theoretical-political comprehension of Western modernity/modernization as systemic self-differentiation, self-subsistence and self-referentiality? It is *directly* the fact that politics has no capability – and legitimacy – to intervene into the instrumental and unpolitical logic of social systems (systemic logic is always self-referential, autonomous and internal – it collapses in the face of alien mechanisms and interventions from outside). As a consequence, political action cannot directly intervene in systemic logic, only indirectly (however, systemic logic directly intervenes in the normative reproduction of the lifeworld!). In other words, politics cannot directly intervene into social systems in any conceivable sense, because of the social systems' technical-logical structuration, programming and functioning which make them depoliticized and non-normative structures, arenas, values, dynamics and subjects – here, social systems are impartial, neutral, formal and impersonal subjects, fields, practices and codes, technical-logical structures, dynamics and subjects with no carnality and politics, overlapped with and autonomous in relation to social classes, social struggles and political *praxis*, as if separated from society. What is the consequence of the Habermasian individualization of Western modernization's and social systems' political subjects? It is, as said before, the impossibility to affirm social classes and attribute to them a central political role in the social and institutional transformation and evolution. Contemporary political democracies have no social classes in a broad sense and, therefore, political transformations must be moderated due to the fact that there are no more political super-subjects that can assume a social and normative comprehension of politics and emancipation. Political subjects of contemporary democracies are private (and sometimes also selfish) citizen initiatives and social movements, with a particularized worldview and practical action, which means that they have no conditions to assume classical pretensions (political and normative pretensions) presupposed by Marxist theory both in terms of a macro social-political subject and a radical and direct mass political *praxis* regarding institutions (see Habermas, 2003b, p. 104-106; 1999, p. 76-77).

But what does the individualization of political subjects really mean? Now, it means exactly the affirmation of strong institutionalism as the core of social dynamics and political legitimation. The first reason for that is exactly the understanding of the modern social systems as technical-logical, non-political and non-normative structures which have an internal, self-referential, self-subsisting and autonomous procedure of constitution, legitimation and evolution that separates and overlaps these social systems regarding political *praxis* and social normativity. In the same way, secondly, the inexistence of macro

social-political classes and the consequent individualization of the political subjects lead to the end of the direct political *praxis* assumed by social classes regarding institutions – democratic institutions became the effective political subject and arena of institutional-societal constitution, legitimation and evolution, the *medium* between social systems and civil society. Social normativity, in contemporary democracies, does not belong to any specific social class, as well as social struggles are not the motto of social evolution and institutional designs, including the pathways taken by politics itself. Then, normativity is assumed – in Habermas's theory in particular and in liberal and social-democratic political theories in general – by the very political-juridical institutions. Political subjects no longer represent a general intersubjective conception of social normativity, nor social struggles between classes define what is normativity and, in fact, the pathway taken by institutions and social evolution, as I said before. *Only institutions* have the capacity and legitimacy to do this; and they do so from a systemic perspective and procedure. Indeed, political-juridical institutions assume the role and the core of social evolution and political legitimation, from systems theory assumed by liberal and social-democratic political theories (Rawls, Habermas, Giddens are the main examples here), because they substitute social classes concerning the guard, fomentation and grounding of social normativity, becoming the fundamental epistemological-political subject of institutional-societal dynamics, beyond the politicity of nowadays life and social struggles of the political subjects of civil society. Again: it is not the case that citizen initiatives and social movements cannot assume social normativity as their motto, but social normativity is fundamentally provided by political-juridical institutions and it is their internal, impartial, neutral, formal and impersonal proceduralism that constitutes the way and the last word to any form of political decision, social construction and theoretical interpretation of what is legitimate and even to what are the real and effective political subjects of institutional-societal grounding, structuration and management. Therefore, by the fact that there are no social classes that can assume the guard and fomentation of social normativity, this social normativity is monopolized by political-juridical institutions, and all that can be performed politically must be realized by political-juridical institutions, from their internal systemic logic and valid political subjects (that is, political parties and courts, as social systems' technicians and elites).

Habermas uses the term *citizenship without subject* to signify this contemporary situation of the inexistence of social classes which can assume social normativity in the name of society as their motto to social transformation. Citizenship without subject exactly implies the centrality of political-juridical institutions and their internal and systemic proceduralism as the core of democratic legitimation and evolution. Here, in the contemporary societies marked by the anonymity and individualization of the social-political subjects, as for the centrality of self-referential, self-subsisting and autonomous social systems, the political-juridical institutions assume a central role in democratic social evolution because there is not a specific super-dimensioned social class that is capable to assume the general coordinates and directions of social evolution as its own matter, practice and purpose; in other words, there is no super-dimensioned social class that can represent social normativity as a whole and attain it to the whole of society, and juridical-political institutions now represent a general notion of society and social normativity. This is the main problem with the individualization of political subjects in contemporary liberal and social-democratic philosophical-political theory and specially in Habermas's philosophical-political theory: on one hand, it cannot explain social evolution as a result of social struggles between social classes, and it cannot even conceive of

institutional designs and political configurations as a result of these social struggles and class hegemony (and their counterpoints); on the other hand, it must assume — in the moment that it denies social classes as political subjects and social struggles as the central basis of institutional structuration and social constitution — both a systemic explanation of social evolution (modernization as systemic autonomization, self-differentiation and self-referentiality, that is a non-political explanation) and the centrality of political-juridical institutions and of their impartial, neutral, formal and impersonal proceduralism as the basis to the social evolution and to the legitimation of power, understanding them as independent of social-political subjects, impartial, impersonal, unpolitical and neutral (see Habermas, 2003b, p. 72).

This is the reason why contemporary philosophical-political theories — as those of Rawls, Habermas and Giddens, for example — refuse a type of radical politics that has as central aim the association between political institutions, social classes and social struggles. This kind of radical politics centralizes all social evolution in the political forces and their clashes, conceiving, therefore, institutional designs and social configurations as a result of these clashes and class hegemony. So, in order to reach such correlation between institutions, social classes and social struggles, the theoretical-political *praxis* must start from the fact that institutions are not situated beyond social classes and social struggles, but are the very result of social struggles between social classes, their counterpoints and hegemony, as is being argued in this article. From this theoretical-political standpoint, democratic politics is not an institutional procedure which is technical-logical and an impartial, neutral, formal and impersonal proceduralism regarding social classes and their struggles, as well as democracy has not its centrality in political-juridical institutions, their internal procedures and legal authorities (political parties and courts). Democratic politics is essentially the permanent class struggle, and here social movements assume a basic role to social evolution, a more important role than political-juridical institutions and their bureaucratic staff. Now, Rawls, Habermas and Giddens have, as a result of their philosophical-political positions, the argument that political-juridical institutions are not just the core of democratic legitimation, but also the political path and arena, the normative basis, and even the political subject and procedures to democratic constitution. Juridical-political institutions as an impartial, neutral, formal and impersonal proceduralism, subject, practice and arena are the core and assume the role of institutional-societal constitution, legitimation and evolution, beyond social classes and social struggles, becoming overlapped with and independent of them and, as a consequence, becoming very unpolitical, depoliticizing as well the epistemological political subjects and social struggles of civil society (see Rawls, 2000, § 39, p. 249-257; Habermas, 2003b, p. 105; Giddens, 1996, p. 93-102). However, a problem arises from that separation between institutions and social-political subjects, because, as I have been claiming, political institutions are not a technical-logical unpolitical structure nor an impersonal, impartial and neutral arena, procedures and subjects that are located beyond political subjects or social classes. In other words, the individualization of political subjects and the use of systems theory in order to conceive-frame-legitimize modern institutions lead both to the centrality of political-juridical institutions (affirmed from a systemic, non-political perspective), with their separation and independence toward social classes and social struggles, and to the refusal of a radical politics that criticizes institutional autonomization, self-referentiality and self-subsistence concerning social classes and social struggles, a radical politics which also criticizes-frames the association between pure normativism, individualization of political subjects and strong

institutionalism, which is the consequence of assuming systems theory as the theoretical-political basis for understanding, legitimizing and framing the process of Western modernization.

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4. Beyond Strong Institutionalism

The conception of democratic normativism as an abstract, impartial, impersonal and neutral basis to the orientation and judgment of different social matters and political subjects, linked with the affirmation of the individualization of political subjects, which can no longer be understood as social classes, that is, as super-dimensioned political subjects, leads directly to strong institutionalism, which implies that political-juridical institutions monopolize the guard, the foundation and the fostering of this democratic normativism to all society. And, in strong institutionalism, it is the systemic explanation and dynamics of societal-institutional constitution by institutional legal staffs from a technical-logical standpoint that define both theoretical explanation and political action (see Habermas, 1999, p. 68-74). This is, as I have been claiming in this article, the major tendency in contemporary philosophical-political theory, in the sense that the very center of political *praxis* is constituted by the institutions and their internal proceduralism and self-authorized legal staff. Here, it is not the fact that social movements and citizen initiatives are not considered by contemporary political thought, but they can only be comprehended in the field opened by systemic explanation of social evolution and systemic conception of institutional logic and dynamics. In other words, political subjects of civil society can only act politically from the arena, dynamics and subjects constituted and allowed by institutionalism. Institutionalism is the epistemological-political-normative basis; the political subjects of civil society start from here and assume a complementary role regarding institutionalism — they cannot substitute institution's internal proceduralism, codes, values and self-authorized subjects.

According to this hegemonic kind of contemporary political theory assumed by liberal and social-democratic political positions (Rawls, Habermas, and Giddens, as cited), the basis of theoretical-political analysis is the institutional systemic logic, that is, the internal institutional mechanisms of functioning of the very social systems (State and market, or even cultural and scientific institutions in many cases). Institutions are a super-dimensioned subject, like the Rawlsian concept of basic structure of society or the Habermasian concept of social system above mentioned, in the sense that their codes and processes determine general social conditions, the dynamics of socialization and subjectivation. Then, political theory must organize these institutions or social systems as the condition to social justice and the good functioning of them. In this case, the presupposition is very clear and direct: institutions constitute the social world, define it and organize it. But is this the right way to understand institutional constitution, legitimation and evolution, as institutional social-political role? What is an institution or a social system? In contemporary political theory, social systems are technical-logical structures of functioning that monopolize specific fields of society from an instrumental standpoint which is non-political and non-normative. These logics are essentially self-referential, self-subsisting and autonomous, closed to other logics. They are definitely non-political, and this is the key to understand which political conception and *praxis* we can construct or not. Is this the kind of institution or social system that defines generic social structuration? Is social evolution a technical matter, a systemic self-reformism? Is such an impartial, neutral, impersonal and formal institutionalism the basic arena and the political subject of societal-institutional constitution, legitimation and evolution?

Now, we can perceive that it is obvious that institutions or social systems are general structures which make and organize social evolution as a whole, *but they are not technical-logical structures or subjects. They are political*, their structuration and dynamics are political. So they cannot be understood as super-dimensioned political subjects based on and determined and performed by an impartial, neutral, formal and impartial proceduralism regarding class belonging and struggles and hegemony, but the result of these social classes and their struggles. This is the problem with the assumption of systemic explanation of society and its institutions. In the moment that we understand society or its institutions as social systems with a self-referential, self-subsistent, internal and closed technical-logical functioning and programming and as a technical-logical macro-structural subject, we abandon the political explanation of societal constitution and institutional structuration-grounding. Indeed, systemic theory must renounce politics both as explanation and *praxis* in favor of a technical-logical and non-politicized explanation and action. The consequence of systemic explanation and *praxis* is that political explanation is substituted with technical-logical explanation; political action is substituted by technical-institutional reformism; and radical politics is substituted with autonomous, self-referential and internal systemic logic; likewise, social classes are substituted with institution's self-authorized legal staffs. Systems are autonomous and self-subsisting and self-referential technical-logical structures, becoming depoliticized. Therefore, politics becomes an institutional action subordinated to social systems' dynamics, not to the radical *praxis* situated beyond systemic logic, dynamics and technocratic subjects.

So, why is the systemic comprehension of society and institutions non-political and technocratic? Because it centralizes social evolution *within* institutional and systemic logic, attributing to the internal logic of social systems and institutions a self-referential, self-subsisting and autonomous role which is non-political, but entirely technical. A social system as a technical-logical structure with a self-referential, self-subsisting and closed dynamics of functioning and programming effaces the political-normative constitution, legitimation and evolution of the institutions, of their internal core, which means that institutions, from the point of view of systems theory, have a very unpolitical role. Politics is still important, but in these philosophical-political theories it is limited and determined by structural closure of institutional dynamics, at least in a strong way. That is the reason why Habermas said that politics has no conditions to perform a direct intervention into the social systems, as much as it cannot be assumed by a specific social class against institutions and beyond internal institutional procedure of representative politics – here, in the notion of institutions based on and defined by systems theory, politics is institutional politics, the political arena are the technical-logical institutional dynamics, and the political subjects are the technical-logical institutions and their self-authorized legal staffs; in other words, the political role of systems theory is fundamentally unpolitical, because it depoliticizes the social systems and their procedures, dynamics and subjects (see Habermas, 2003a, p.190, e p. 290; 2003b, p. 105, e p. 147-148). Finally, such a separation between institutionalism and social classes and social struggles, as the affirmation of systems theory as the basis of the understanding-framing-legitimizing the impartial, neutral, formal and impersonal institutional proceduralism are the reasons why Rawls said that violent civil disobedience against institutions is forbidden, since it violates both systemic self-referentiality (that is, the fact that social systems are not primarily political) and the centrality of the institutional juridical-political proceduralism which are, I repeat again, impartial, neutral, formal and impersonal regarding social classes and class

struggles, disconnected of them, overlapped with them (see Rawls, 2000, §§ 53-55, p. 388-418). In the last instance, legitimation is a monopoly of institutions and social systems, as well as the legitimate political process is a very institutional matter, it has a very institutional way and political-technical subjects. Any kind of political legitimation must be institutional and respect the systemic logic of institutions, must have institutional-legal actors, or it is not an effective form of legitimation — here is the basis of strong institutionalism in the contemporary liberal and social-democratic political theories.

Systemic institutional dynamics appears both as internal and self-referential and self-subsisting proceduralism (concerning political subjects and social normative claims, and even in relation to the social spontaneity of social movements and citizen initiatives), and as non-political and technical institutional structuration and constitutive movement. In both senses, social evolution is assumed as an institutional central task and monopoly. Likewise, systemic institutional dynamics can dispense political explanation and political subjects as the motto to the understanding of the very institutional and systemic designs, because this systemic dynamics depends on technical mechanisms and bureaucratic proceduralism — and social clashes and a radical politics damage the purity and objectivity of systemic analysis and action. Moreover, social systems and institutions are super-dimensioned subjects, contrarily to individual political subjects from civil society, which means that they effectively substitute social classes or individual political subjects both in the monopolization and streamlining of social normativity (in the sense that institutions and social systems — and no longer social classes and their struggles — represent the essential sense of democracy and social evolution) and in the democratic decision-making process (or at least, institutions and social systems delimit all that democracy can signify and make, all that can be done politically, in the same manner as institutional self-authorized legal staffs conduct the institutional-societal process of legitimation, constitution and evolution, attributing a peripheral role to the political subjects of civil society). Therefore, democracy is now an institutional arrangement and a systemic structuration, a technical-logical proceduralism centralized, monopolized and streamlined by self-referential, self-subsisting and closed institutions from an impartial, neutral, formal and impersonal proceduralism which is pure and objective regarding political *praxis*, class belonging and struggles; thus, institutions and social systems, from this purity, objectivity and technicality, represent and achieve the core of democratic society and its evolution, centralizing even social normativity and representing also both a general structure from which society acquires form and movement, and a super-dimensioned political subject that directs the evolution itself.

There is, of course, in contemporary liberal and social-democratic philosophical-political theories, a link and a relationship between institutions and social spontaneity (i.e., non-institutional political *praxis*, like social movements and social initiatives), but strong institutionalism has the normative-political centrality, because it is conceived of — and it conceives itself — as a systemic technical-logical structuration, proceduralism and subject, based on its own instrumental, pure (scientifically speaking) and unpolitical logic, which is not spontaneous, but calculated, programmable, self-subsisting. Now, in this sense, institutional systemic comprehension is closed to a radical politics streamlined from civil society by social movements and citizen initiatives that can substitute or overcome institutional systemic self-referentiality, self-subsistence and autonomy, destroying the internal and technical logic of political-juridical institutions and social systems. Social-political spontaneity is not systemic, as it cannot be understood or

controlled by technical-logical, impartial, neutral and impersonal procedural mechanisms and movements and subjects. Social-political spontaneity is non-systemic *par excellence*. Therefore, the intersection between institutions or social systems and social movements and citizen initiatives, as it is presupposed by Rawls, Habermas and Giddens, is not fruitful both in theoretical and political terms, due to the complete political centralization of political-juridical institutions, their procedures and political-legal actors – that is the consequence of the confusion between society and social systems or structures: systemic institutions close themselves to the democratic exercise of power, which is principally a question of social systems' internal dynamics, procedures and political-legal actors. Now, if we want to politicize societal-institutional constitution, legitimation and evolution, then we must politicize institutions, institutional proceduralism and social classes by denying systems theory as the basis of the comprehension-framing-grounding of the process of Western modernization. The conciliation between systems theory and normative-political theory proposed by Rawls, Habermas and Giddens does not work, because it is impossible to overcome the technical-logical structuration, functioning and programming of the social systems by political *praxis* and social normativity, as it is impossible to substitute institutional self-referentiality and self-subsistence with the spontaneous political *praxis* performed from the political subjects of civil society. As a consequence, a political theory must be completely political, a direct democratic political *praxis* which refuses the correlation and the mutual support between systems theory and strong institutionalism and technocracy.

In this sense, and as consequence of the systemic institutional comprehension of politics, there is a frontier and a barrier that cannot be crossed by social movements and citizen initiatives, which are the substitution of political-juridical institutions and the overthrow of systemic logic which constitutes the contemporary hegemonic comprehension of juridical-political institutions and social systems (a liberal and social-democratic comprehension). As it is being insisted upon in this article, social systems and political-juridical institutions centralize, monopolize and streamline from a technical-logical dynamics the arena, procedures and political actors that define all political movements, institutional arrangements and democratic evolution, because, in the first place, institutions are the only super-dimensioned political subject that remains after the end of social classes and their reciprocal struggles, monopolizing social normativity and, therefore, associating themselves directly with democracy, a kind of democracy which is basically dependent upon institutionalism and defined by it. Here, democracy can even start from civil society by social movements and citizen initiatives, but at the end its core and decision-making political-juridical center-subject is raised into and by the political-juridical institutions conceived in a systemic way, as the political subject of systemic institutions is subsumed by institutional elites and technicians. This is the maximum point that democracy allows for contemporary social movements and citizen initiatives: social participation up to the door of political-juridical institutions; inside, the internal institutional logic, procedures and political actors have all the power to legitimize the entire social evolution and institutional functioning and programming over time.

Because of this systemic comprehension of society and institutions, we can perceive, in contemporary liberal and social-democratic philosophical-political theories, the incapability to conceive of and interpret the intrinsic relationship between systemic political institutions, political parties and economic oligarchies that undermines an inclusive, participative and radical democratic constitution and evolution: there are no

political super-subjects to social emancipation beyond institutions, their internal logic, procedures and political actors; therefore, there is no democracy beyond representation and social systems' technical and self-referential logic and dynamics. Any possible change is an *institutional change*, which preserves systemic structuration and dynamics – because politics becomes dependent on systemic logic, framed and conducted by it, and completely grounded on internal institutional technical-logical dynamics. But what we can see in our contemporary societies – and the current social-economic crisis shows it – is the deep and intrinsic link between a systemic conception of institutions, political parties and economic oligarchies, which presupposes the centrality of all political field, power and actors *inside juridical-political institutions* conceived of and streamlined from a technical-logical proceduralism, in the sense that systemic dynamics is always preserved from a radical criticism and political *praxis* because of its technicality and unpoliticity. Therefore, contemporary liberal and social-democratic political thought, in the moment that it affirms a systemic comprehension of society and its institutions, becomes blind to the current *praxis*, undermining an inclusive social participation and the possibility of emergence of other social-political alternatives to the hegemonic systemic comprehension of democracy and political-juridical institutions based on the correlation and mutual support between strong institutionalism and systemic logic which depoliticizes institutions, institutional legal staff and the political subjects of civil society, rendering institutions depoliticized and overlapped with social classes and their struggles. In our contemporary societies, the intrinsic link between systemic institutional comprehension-grounding, political parties and economic oligarchies is directly or indirectly based on a conception of society as defined and streamlined by technical-logical social systems and institutional impartial, neutral, formal and impersonal procedural dynamics, beyond social spontaneity, politics, social classes and their struggles.

Conclusion

My theoretical-political proposal (which is not an original one) is to substitute institutional and systemic analysis and conception of politics, which bases strong institutionalism and social systems' self-referentiality, self-subsistence and technical-logical structuration, management and functioning, with the affirmation of the centrality of social classes, social struggles and class hegemony to the understanding of institutional designs, social evolution, political subjects and political *praxis*. Social struggles should be reinstated as the theoretical-practical basis of political action, the same as the social classes as the political subjects of social evolution and institutional structuration. This theoretical-political position could help us to overcome the nefarious contemporary philosophical-political tendency (even on the left) that associates pure normativism, individualization of political subjects and a systemic comprehension of institutions and social evolution, which leads to a strong and closed institutionalism as the core of social and political evolution. As I argued in the article, this main tendency of our contemporary political thought leads directly or indirectly to the effacement or at least to a considerable undermining of political *praxis* and of a broad and radical sense of democracy. The consequence is the very strong centralization and monopolization of all political field and political actors inside institutions and their internal juridical-political and representative procedures. The other consequence is the submission of politics to systemic internal logic of institutions, because these institutions, conceived of in a technical-logical way and dynamics, have a self-referential and self-subsisting proceduralism centralized and managed by institutional legal staffs, as well as technical, non-political and non-normative mechanisms

and actors. Therefore, politics cannot directly intervene into the systemic internal logics of the institutions or social systems. The third characteristic of strong institutionalism is that institutions monopolize the guard, the fomentation and the daily grounding of social normativity, in substitution to social classes and political actors. Institutions are the social normativity, the political sphere and the very political actors, beyond social dynamics, social classes and social struggles – institutions appear as a pure, objective and, therefore, very impartial and neutral world, beyond the social dimension, beyond popular participation, beyond the politicity and the pungency of daily life. And, as the fourth characteristic of strong institutionalism, institutions are conceived of as impartial, neutral, impersonal and very objective instances of decision and legitimation, as they become independent of social classes and their struggles.

All of these characteristics attribute to political-juridical institutions not only an absolute independency, superiority and technicality concerning social classes and struggles, but also the complete legitimacy to centralize and monopolize the real sense and *praxis* of democracy, reducing politics to institutional politics, institutional procedures and institutional-legal actors. An ideological and conservative political position comes from here, namely that all social transformation must be an institutional transformation, all political subjects must be institutional-legal subjects, all political movements must be institutional-legal movements, all political dynamics must be a systemic institutional dynamics, and all we can think and do politically must be according to a systemic interpretation of institutions – *and in a systemic institutional way*. In other words, there is no more radical democratic politics, but institutional technocracy; there is no more political *praxis*, but systemic dynamics; there is no more political spontaneity, but the very fact of systemic logic and institutional representation. In addition, the impartial, neutral, impersonal and very objective institutional paradigm attributed to political-juridical institutions by systems theory makes them historically and sociologically blind to the social classes and their struggles, meaning that institutions are always perceived as the pure state of democracy and as completely legitimized impartial and impersonal political actors, independent of and located beyond empirical clashes and political subjects. Therefore, the hegemonic comprehension of politics which is the consequence of systems theory assumed-performed by liberal and social-democratic political theories directly or indirectly leads to the affirmation of technocracy and systemic logic, to the centrality of institutional logic and procedures as the core of social evolution and, in the end, to the undermining of political *praxis* as an inclusive and non-institutional action, subordinating politics to systemic logic and institutional closure, self-referentiality, self-subsistence and technicality.

Strong institutionalism based on a systemic comprehension of society, institutions and politics cannot explain nor resolve the current social-economic crisis. Actually, conservative theoretical-political positions in relation to this crisis basically understand it from a systemic perspective, in the sense that the social-economic crisis is not, in the first place, a social crisis, but a *technical* crisis, which can – and must – be corrected by institutional technical-logical mechanisms that preserve systemic self-referentiality, self-subsistence and autonomy concerning democratic politics and social normativity. Institutional technical mechanisms will put systemic logic in its right place. That is what we can expect of political reformism, according to conservative theoretical-political positions. The fact that in these conservative positions the crisis is just a systemic crisis can be seen here, and therefore it does not need to be publically discussed. There is

no need of a radical public discussion, due to the fact that systemic logic can only be understood by technocracy, by the very institutions and their legitimate actors, and according to their internal systemic dynamics. This is the reason why the theoretical-political conservative thought refuses democratic politics as a normative content and especially as a political *praxis*, a non-systemic, non-technical and non-institutional *praxis*. This is the reason why conservative politics is pure and strong institutionalism, closed to an inclusive social participation — a strong institutionalism deeply rooted in a systemic unpolitical and impersonal proceduralism and logic which is basically technical.

A strong institutionalism is not political, but just technical; it is not politically inclusive, but exclusive. As I said before, liberal and social-democratic philosophical-political theories, in the moment they assume strong institutionalism and systemic explanation as an imbricated and correlated assumption to the understanding of contemporary political dynamics, cannot explain the current social-economic crisis; they become also a theoretical-political legitimation of current conservatism (which is currently growing very fast in political and cultural terms), corroborating the systemic comprehension of institutions, politics and the market — that is, for short, the basis of contemporary philosophical-political conservative theories. The only institutional solution which appears from conservatism is in favor of self-referential and self-subsisting systemic logics, in favor of economic oligarchies' *laissez-faire* or in favor of political subordination to the systemic logic of the market. So, a spontaneous perspective of politics is now very necessary, as well as the overcoming of the systemic comprehension of institutionalism and social evolution. But such spontaneous perspective in politics and the overcoming of systemic institutional comprehension (and, of course, the democratic refusal of the reduction of politics and institutions to self-referential and self-subsisting systemic logics) can only be provided by the affirmation of social classes and social struggles as the key to democratic social evolution. These concepts politicize, historicize and sociologize political *praxis*, as well as they root social evolution and institutional designs in their right place, that is, as the result of social struggles between social classes. In this situation, institutional and systemic dynamics are not a pure, objective, impersonal, impartial and autonomous movement, as they do not have an independent, self-referential and self-subsistent development in relation to social-political class struggles, but they are constituted, defined and streamlined by these struggles. Politics is made by social-political classes and their reciprocal struggles, not by pure, impartial, impersonal and neutral institutions; politics is not a technical and systemic logic, but the very crude and permanent struggle for power, determined by class hegemony; in the same way, institutional constitution, legitimation and evolution is performed from social clashes and class hegemony, which, firstly, puts social classes and their struggles as the basis of the institutions, and secondly renders institutions very political-normative structures and *praxis*, not a technical-logical matter-*praxis*-management.

Social classes and social struggles, correlatively to the negation of the systemic comprehension of social evolution and institutional structuration, make the theoretical-political consideration of the conflict between capital and labor important again as the core of contemporary social-political dynamics, as well as the explanation of social division and the political forces based on this distinction. Indeed, current social-economic crisis is not a crisis in the systemic mechanisms of the market, but a conflict between capital and labor exacerbated by economic globalization, in the sense that economic globalization has redefined Welfare States' social protection and economic intervention,

as the political influence of the working classes — now, transnational financial capitals and forms of labor from China and other Eastern countries (low wages and intensified and high exploitation of labor) are the basis of a neoliberal and conservative reformulation of current conditions of the relationship between capital and labor. Likewise, what we can see today is the fact that nation-states are more and more hostages of financial capital, which appropriates a large part of the public funds, powerfully defining political ways of public administrations and political legislations, defining as well the path of democratic social evolution and democratic political constitution (see Piketty, 2014; Krugman, 2009). These political movements cannot be understood by systemic technical-logical and unpolitical analysis (as I have defined throughout the article), but by a theoretical-political position that affirms social classes, social struggles and, therefore, the classical Marxist approach founded on the conflict between capital and labor as the basis of social-political constitution and evolution.

In a similar manner, it is necessary to reinforce and affirm a political notion of Western modernization, of the modern institutions or social systems which can overcome their technical-logical understanding as presupposed by systems theory. Indeed, as I have argued throughout the article, the use of systems theory by liberal and social-democratic political theories — like those of Rawls, Habermas and Giddens — in order to understand, frame and legitimize the process of Western modernization in general and modern social systems in particular depoliticizes and technicizes these modern institutions, because it conceives of them as technical-logical structures which have a self-referential, self-subsisting and closed logic of functioning and programming. Such an institutional logic is non-political and non-normative, but merely technical, and it is defined and managed as an impartial, neutral, formal and impersonal proceduralism which is basically centralized, monopolized and streamlined as an internal movement of self-constitution, self-legitimation and self-evolution that blocks and deletes political *praxis* and social normativity of its internal functioning and programming. Likewise, as a technical-logical structure and proceduralism, the modern social systems, from the perspective of systems theory, are managed only by technocracy and by their internal self-authorized legal staffs, becoming totally instrumental, overlapped with the current politicized nature of the social classes and their struggles for hegemony. Now, the use of systems theory for the understanding-framing-changing of Western modernization institutes a very unpolitical field and subject constituted by social systems, conducting to the effacement of the political *praxis* and the political subjects of the institutional context and dynamics. Here, only technicians from a technical-logical procedure have the legitimacy to determine the institutional constitution, legitimation and evolution. From systems theory, therefore, a definitive barrier is set between, on the one hand, technical-logical institutions, their internal impartial, neutral, impersonal and formal proceduralism assumed and managed by the institution's self-authorized legal staffs and, on the other hand, the political subjects or social classes of civil society. As a consequence, systemic institutions are pure technical-logical structures with no politicized nature, becoming overlapped with social classes and their struggles.

That is the reason why a critical social theory which grounds a radical democratic political *praxis* for contemporary societies and for international politics (as intended by Rawls, Habermas and Giddens) must face systems theory and assume a totally political understanding of the process of Western modernization and of modern social systems. It is in this sense that I used the concepts of social class and social struggles as the basis

of my analysis here: they allow, in my view, the politicization of the process of Western modernization and of modern social systems, because these concepts regard such a process and modern institutions as results of the current political *praxis* performed by the class struggles and counterpoints and hegemony. Here, there are no technical-logical institutions and an impartial, neutral, formal and impersonal proceduralism as basis of societal-institutional constitution, legitimation and evolution, but the permanent and direct class struggle which pungently and unceasingly intends to confront political-cultural conservatism based on systems theory. Therefore, Western modernization in general and modern social systems in particular are, first and foremost, a political dispute, and their hegemonic notion is the result of class hegemony and counterpoints. In a similar manner, alternative theoretical-political proposals to approach them need to reach political hegemony, which means that social classes must perform a very acute social struggle in relation to systemic institutions and their elites in order to overcome the self-referential, self-subsisting and closed technical-logical structuration and functioning of social systems. Now, only the permanent and pungent social participation into political *praxis* and as political *praxis* by the political subjects of civil society can guarantee minimal parity, inclusion and institutional moderation in terms of that self-referential, self-subsisting and technical-logical institutional understanding. For this purpose, the theoretical-political deconstruction of the liberal and social-democratic use of systems theory to the understanding-framing of the process of Western modernization is an urgent task, since the correlation between technical-logical, self-referential and self-subsisting social systems with an impartial, neutral, formal and impersonal proceduralism as the basis of their legitimation and of the constitution, grounding and streamlining of the juridical-political institutions is the main and the more dangerous mistake committed by liberalism and social-democracy in terms of the recovery and renewal of a philosophical-sociological discourse of Western modernization which is emancipatory and political. As I argued throughout the article, systems theory is unpolitical and depoliticizes the social systems' constitution, legitimation and evolution, making these social systems overlapped with the political subjects of civil society. Now, it is the social classes and their struggles that can allow the complete politicization of social systems – a necessary theoretical-political route for the effective grounding of a political theory that can critically and radically face political-cultural conservatism. Facing contemporary conservatism fundamentally means the contraposition to systems theory with a very political theory based on the notions of social class and class struggles.

The politicization of the social systems from the refusal of the systems theory's technical-logical understanding-legitimation, as from the refusal of the liberal and social-democratic theories' anonimization and individualization of the political subjects, which lead to strong institutionalism and to an impartial, neutral, formal and impersonal proceduralism as the basis of institutional-societal legitimation and evolution, means that the social systems are not a private, autonomous and very individualized and closed technical-logical sphere of social reproduction with no politicity and carnality. It also means that the political subject of institutional-societal evolution is not technical-logical, self-referential and self-subsisting, but a very political-normative sphere-dynamics-subject rooted in civil society's political-normative arena and *praxis*. In this sense, another contribution of my position is the overcoming of the privatization and depoliticization and non-normative constitution-grounding of the technical-logical social systems, by politicizing them, by inserting them into the political-normative sphere-*praxis* constituted by civil society. Here, they become the result of class struggles and hegemony, which means, therefore,

that they are firstly a political-normative *praxis* performed and defined by the pungency and hegemony of the social classes and their struggles. As a consequence, political *praxis* based on social normativity and assumed by the political subjects of civil society has the legitimacy to directly intervene into the social systems, refusing their non-political and non-normative constitution, legitimation and evolution, refusing their self-referentiality and self-subsistence regarding political *praxis* and social normativity. In the same way, the political subjects of civil society, by the politicization of the social systems and their link with the political-normative arena-*praxis* constituted by civil society and its social classes and class struggles, can directly intervene into the juridical-political institution's internal proceduralism, substituting both this impartial, neutral, formal and impersonal proceduralism and the institutional legal staffs with spontaneous political *praxis* and social classes. This is, according the point of view advocated in this article, a very important theoretical-political way to overcome the conservative use of systems theory and imposition of strong institutionalism, systemic logic and the impartial, neutral, formal and impersonal proceduralism as the basis of societal-institutional constitution, legitimation and evolution.

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Notes

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