

The institutional crisis at the university: the forms of our university politics and the *university form of politics*

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SUMMARY

The institutional crisis at UBA and other prestigious national universities is a crisis of their organic autonomy stemming from the gradual depletion suffered by the Argentinean tradition of a *university demos* that has by now shrunk to a realm of positions of power and of strategic policies without any relation to knowledge or any kind of substantive debate about the University. In mass universities, the said depletion follows into the footsteps of the most strategic and instrumental forms used in party politics, blurring the boundaries between universities and the society. However, the Argentinean *university demos* is filled with a wealth of contents and has not ceased to be a source of sense when it comes to articulating ways of critical resistance that contribute to the *form adopted by politics in the university*. It is precisely this comparative advantage that is renounced when our forms of university politics behave as parasites feeding on a form of power which, *intra muros*, reproduces the hegemonic and domination ways typical of systemic politics.

The story behind the institutional crisis

For the most part of the current academic year 2006¹, Buenos Aires University and the National University of Comahue have been blocked by an unprecedented institutional crisis in the history of Argentinean university politics ever since the country's return to democracy in 1983. On this occasion, the issue is not a consequence of the chronic budgetary dearth or of any other front of conflict external to the university. The crisis involves the exercise of autonomous joint management resulting from the summons to University Assemblies in order to choose the next brood of high academic authorities. Although the crisis is strongly marked by idiosyncrasy, it reveals a shared structural view inherent to the questioning of the legitimacy of University Assemblies in their present state. The campaign was launched by a sector of the students' representatives who adhere to the left in terms of university politics (in the case of Buenos Aires, the present FUBA**).

It is not the *legality* of these University Assemblies that is called into question, for they have been created in strict accordance with the ruling statutes. The questioning is addressed at their representational structure. Therefore, this institutional crisis is not attached to juridical matters but to political issues. In fact, it is argued that the very form adopted by the Assembly is null, since it does not genuinely represent the actual university community and that, consequently, it has no authority not only to deal with the elections of the new authorities but also to undertake the reforms that might improve autonomous co-management and amend its present provisos. As a corollary of

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this analysis, there is a request for a new *constitutional congress*². In order to carry out their proposal, student militants have been boycotting the meetings of University Assemblies in both universities for the last six months. Buenos Aires University has been undergoing a virtual takeover that materializes every time the date for a meeting is announced, and so the right to hold an Assembly is thwarted, whereas the Rectorate and Schools of the National University of Comahue have been under student occupation³.

The *decisionistic* form of the university's universal deprivation of rights and the crisis of university politics

If we take into account the three dimensions of university autonomy described as components of the contemporary university by Guy Neave and other specialists, we need to speak of *external autonomy, organic autonomy, and administrative autonomy*⁴. In this context, it cannot be denied that the crisis evidenced by the incidents concerning the contestation of the Assembly and university statutes is, in the first place, a crisis of *organic autonomy*; i.e., of the internal exercise of autonomous co-management and its normative dispositions. Still, the organic dimension of the crisis would be incomprehensible unless we bore in mind the historical tradition of the Argentinean

² See Christian Castillo. "La necesidad de un Congreso Estatuante universitario", *Ciencias Sociales* magazine # 63. Buenos Aires, July 2006.

³ At the beginning, the situation at UBA was dominated by faculty and students' opposition to Dr. Atilio Alterini's candidature to the Rectorate. According to his dossier, Dr. Alterini, a former Dean of the School of Law, had held a hierarchical position in the Judiciary during the last military dictatorship. The situation worsened when FUBA took over the School of Medicine in order to prevent the fourth failed attempt to gather the University Assembly, which had been called for Tuesday, May 2. That morning, the Security staff of the School of Medicine and a 'clash' group composed by non-teaching staff brutally battered militant students, supposedly with the approval of sectors supporting Alterini. The incident, which was given ample coverage by the media, aroused public indignation, and the crisis came to a turning point that resulting in Alterini standing down from the candidature on May 24. Electoral alliances against his supporters were managed soon afterwards. In this scenario, the alliance among the four opposing Schools (Exact and Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, Philosophy and Letters, and Architecture and Town Planning) had played a major role. Throughout the conflict, all four schools composed a block under the candidature of biologist Alberto Kornblihtt. After Alterini stood down, the initially strong alliance weakened, and the two large new Schools (Medicine and Agronomy) joined the minority. Then the redistribution of electoral alliances polarized round two single candidatures, generating a more equal partition of the forces fighting for the Rectorate. Alfredo Buzzi, Dean of the School of Medicine, rallied round him the Schools of Medicine and Veterinary together with the four minority Schools, which did not retain Kornblihtt's initial candidature, and Boveris, Dean of the School of Pharmacy and Biochemistry, kept the support of the former Alterini alliance. In the meantime, the new Deputy Rector Anibal Franco organized a number of commissions to start discussions about the reform of the university statute which, according to widespread claims, demanded radical changes. However, the new scenario did not solve the institutional crisis, and the fifth attempt to call a meeting of the University Assembly failed again, for FUBA militants took over the Colegio Nacional de Buenos Aires (a university-run school) on Monday, July 17th. FUBA was no longer able to ground its arguments on the Alterini issue; perhaps that was what left it more isolated within the university community and in the eyes of public opinion. On the other hand, the continued takeover of the Neuquén seat of Comahue University by left-wing militant students was solved by a much contested choice of a Rector held in a non-university building. At the beginning, the Judiciary declared the election legal, but reverted its ruling on appeal. At present, the takeover has weakened, and it seems that one sector of the student militancy wishes to abandon this form of protest. Besides, students are feeling ever more tired of the issue, and fear losing the year. This has generated some internal tensions which have occasionally resulted in violence, somehow delegitimizing and eroding the takeover of Comahue University.

⁴ J. De Groof, G. Neave and J. Svec. *Democracy and Governance in Higher Education*. The Hague, Kluwer Law International, 1998, pp. 80 to 82.

university *demos* in connection to the University Reform of 1918 as the ‘great narrative’ that constituted our national university identity. Along these lines, the crisis of organic autonomy may be viewed as the *erosion* of the *Argentinean university demos*, which for two decades has been subject to a dual *fetishist* pressure. On the one hand, the well-known process of mercantilization of academic spaces engineered during the Menem administration, and on the other hand, the fetishization of power inside the university, with its consequent attachment of university political culture to a decisionistic and sovereignistic form of politics. If, as I shall argue here, the crisis of organic autonomy is fully located in the second dimension, it does share elective affinities with the dimension that precedes it, which encourages a question: what is the extent to which the *mercantilization* of our public university under the external functionalist pressure it experienced in the 90s is consistent with the internal transformation of the university’s political culture as some sort of strategic sovereignism and bureaucratic devices tending to the conservation and struggle for hegemony in the university’s microcosm? Paraphrasing Paul Nizan, “There is no reason to disregard this type of question, nor is there any reason not to answer them”.

Well then, calling the University Assembly into question in the name of a representation crisis is a diagnosis based on several confirmed empirical trends. Among them, mostly concerning Buenos Aires University, I have surveyed the following:

a) A deterioration of the relationship between lecturers who have obtained their chairs through a contest and those who have not. Insofar as the Assembly only acknowledges the former group, the increasing numbers of the latter (*pro bono*, acting lecturers, etc) casts doubts on the representativity of the lecturers who have a seat in the Assembly in comparison with the actual universe of the teaching staff.

b) The fact that assistant lecturers are not represented. In fact, assistant lecturers are represented only in their capacity of graduates, which means that there are no differences between graduates who are teaching and those who are not. The latter are not under contract by the University, do not depend on it, and may have no current academic bonds.

c) The fact that lecturers at the Ciclo Básico Común (CBC) are not represented. The CBC, which is the most populated department of Buenos Aires University, lacks the status of a University School. Therefore, unlike the thirteen University Schools, it is not represented either at the University Council or at the University Assembly.

d) The fact that *non teaching staff* is not represented (the double negative sounds redundant, but the whole problem of *at* the University is one of *lack of acknowledgement*. To begin with, this is patent from the way they are *named*, a long-established term that mixes, under a common negative label, the specialized staff working at the scientific libraries, graduate staff members, maintenance employees, janitors, etc.)

e) The fact that graduate and doctoral students are not represented. A doctoral student who has not graduated from the School where he/she is pursuing studies and is not an assistant lecturer at the same institution –and this happens often enough –has no representation at the Governing Board of the School. While this is unacceptable for an advanced student whose experience in University matters is richer than those of graduates who have not pursued further studies, it becomes even worse when compared to the increasing importance of graduate and doctoral studies within the University cycle. The same can be said about lecturers who teach these courses but are not members of the faculty.

f) The debate about under-representation extends to students, in a vast range of proposals that go from the popular “one man = one vote”, a very much criticized suggestion supported by a minority (apart from the fact that is flagrantly contradicts the proportional parity sustained by the Reformers in 1918⁵) to an increase in the quota of student representation until their numbers reach the same levels as those of lecturers in the respective Councils.

⁵ Such parity, so that no university stratum may impose upon others, lay at the base of tripartite philosophy as far back as 1918, as can be seen from the recommendations of the First University Conference held in

I do not intend to dwell on the contents of the above items, but I am most interested in the ways student movements make use of them to carry on with their strategies to obstruct the Assembly. The students' movement is bent on issuing a call for a new "constitutional power" or *constitutional congress* that may put an end to the current institutional system. From this standpoint, the students' protests are nominally equivalent to a revolution. If this were interpreted in the proper light (although the students who impede Assembly meetings are extremely wary of mentioning), it would undermine not just the University Assembly but all institutional mandates deriving from the currently ruling statutes, including those that concern students' representatives, contests to appoint lecturers, and the whole of the University staff. Depriving the University Assembly of its rights is not a cab that will stop where the passenger wishes to descend: if the logic of such action were to be coherently complied with, the heads of the Deans and Council Members, including students, Heads of Departments, Courses of Studies, and Institutes, tenured professors and acting lecturers whose appointments are protected by the said statutes should all roll down the plank of these imaginary gallows.

We could wonder about the legitimacy of the University's *universal deprivation of rights*. One of the answers we might hear is that, being a *foundational act*, it is not necessary to prove its representativity⁶, since it finds its support in the *force* of facts. To defend this line of argument, the Reform of 1918 is cited, for it stemmed from the *general university strike*. However, there are other cases in more recent times that provide further support to this response: the events of 2002, when deprivation of the political rights held by our national institutions and political parties was voiced in the slogan "Out with all of them" ("*Que se vayan todos*").

However, this crisis, referred to institutional erosion, could be signified in relation to a historical narrative that might authorize a *decisionistic* notion of the political as a foundational act. Still, this manner of constructing university politics appears to be rather artificial, disproportionate, and too heavily based on ad hoc essays. To begin with, and apart from the partly vitiated nature of representation as it stands at present, the state of our University bears little resemblance to the clerical and positions-for-life Córdoba University in 1918. The present institutional representation of our public university is both unfair and far from perfect, but in no way can it be compared to the authoritarian, classist University of Córdoba that preceded the Reform and that seemed to leave no way out other than total reconsideration of its institutional values. Moreover, the Reform of 1918 immediately channeled the force of young people that would not be stopped, being as they were encouraged by the revolutionary events that were taking place in Mexico and Russia, in the framework of the catastrophe that swept across Europe at the end of World War I. Consequently, it is impossible to understand the Córdoba University Reform of 1918 out of the cultural and political vanguardism that sprang in those times and that those youthful souls immediately appropriated, demanding a new University to suit a new beginning of History, in which Latin America moved to the limelight⁷. It stands to reason that the present context cannot be compared to those events, even if the phrase "Out with all of them" ("*Que se vayan todos*") is still ringing in our ears after our own debacle in 2002. One indisputable proof of such a contrast is the general indifference with which our students witness university takeovers, as if they were a teleplay on the TV screen.

The above reflections are not aimed at prejudging all of this year's initiatives and protests against the election of a rector under a negative light. The first few university takeovers by the students drew public attention to a number of issues. People were made aware of the unfair statutes and the urgent need to amend them and of the fact that one of the candidates had held office in the

Córdoba by FUA (Argentinean University Federation), in July 1918. See FUBA. *La Reforma Universitaria*, Buenos Aires, Centro de la Facultad de Medicina, 1926, vol. I, p. 29.

⁶ For example, see this type of answer in <http://desdeelaula.blogspot.com>, as a reply to a critical article by Tomás Abraham, entitled "La demolición de la UBA", from May 10, 2006, in <http://www.lacapital.com.ar/2006/05/21/politica/noticia>.

⁷ See FUBA. *La Reforma Universitaria*, *op. cit.* Volumes I, II y III.

Judiciary under the military dictatorship –a blot on UBA. These two points were consistent with a logic of denunciation that, so far, did not necessarily collapse through the envisagement of a request that the university be deprived of its universal rights. It must be agreed that, at the beginning, and regarding public exposure of the said facts, student militants adopted a wiser position than the teaching staff. However, had the latter withdrawn their support of some of student's claims, specially in the four minority faculties who manifested their opposition against Alterini's candidature, the ensuing events would have taken a different course. What is indeed striking is that student leaders *go too far* and *do not keep the necessary distance* when it comes to choosing the right time to check their movement and take conceptual advantage of the takeover as an act of public denunciation and call of attention instead of the exercise of the takeover as a *sine die* blockade of the institution. It looks as if some sort of perfect essayism and experimentalism clouded the minds of the protesters, whose reasoning seems to whisper into their ears that "if everything has gone well up to now" and "we succeeded in ousting Alterini's candidature, why stop now?". Then, leaving aside artificial historical comparisons with the revolutionary steps taken in 1918, the narratives provide an inexhaustible source from which all kinds of militant rhetoric can be extracted⁸.

However, in actual fact, it cannot be said that their *political calculations* respond to an ingenuous appreciation of the situation. The deprivation of the university's universal rights implied in the discourse that advocates the permanent takeover of the University Assembly will not bring about a new revolutionary university. At the most, it will serve as a negotiation factor through demonstrating that the power of veto in the hands of the leaders may result in a new distribution on the strategic scenario of the university's political microcosm. Therefore, regardless of maximalist rhetoric gambits and of the universal rhetoric reach of the notion of deprivation of rights, the militants are well aware that there will not be anything like a revolutionary constitutional congress; in the best of cases, they will achieve an intricate renovation process in which student militants will be able to flaunt a *power of veto* from which they will benefit by occupying further spaces of power. Therefore, the current logic of student' maximalistic position should be understood within a matrix of strategic decisionism with expectations of new gains in terms of power inside the institution. But it is precisely at this point where the hypothesis of a political culture marked by decisionism and sovereignty raises its head once more. That is to say, there is a revival of the notion that the University is a likely microcosm where to struggle for power, and that the struggle legitimizes the very same tactical and strategic movements as would be acceptable on the arena of general politics. This is what I shall address in the next section.

The form of university politics and the university form of politics

To put it mildly, it would be at least arbitrary to blame the establishment of a decisionistic form of university politics on leftist student sectors. Actually, ever since the return to democracy in 1983, but most especially during the Menem administration, the Argentinean university *demos* has undergone sovereignist interpretations of university politics which, in turn, have squeezed the interpretation of university democracy into the straitjacket of power politics. This has brought about ignorance of the spirit if not of the letter of the limitations of a collegiate form of government and, consequently, of the *university form of politics*. According to the said *sovereignism*, the struggle for the Rectorate is viewed as a struggle for *power inside the University* and must hence be translated into constructions leading to political hegemony, ruling cliques, and techniques that will ensure the

⁸ On the anachronistic, acritical reappearance of old mottoes, repeated with a certain dose of psittacism on the walls of Buenos Aires University as if time had stopped, see Emilio de Ipola, "Un legado trunco", en F. Naishtat, A. García Raggio and S. Villavicencio (Comps.). *Filosofías de la universidad y conflicto de racionalidades*. Buenos Aires, Colihue, 2001, pp. 229 to 236.

consolidation and continuity of political domination. This form of university politics has often enabled representatives to move back and forth, without interruptions, from political positions at the University to political positions in professional politics. In such cases, the collegiate form of university government has not only failed to inhibit the perversions of university politics, but also served to conceal them.⁹

Criticizing domination and hegemonic politics inside the University does not entail defending an apolitical University or political neutrality of the Academia following Weber's model of the value-neutrality of science. Rather, it stands up for the existence of a *university specificity of politics* in order to confront it to the forms of university politics as it works in Argentina. This is an attempt to radically put an end to the false antinomy between a hegemonic, *sovereignist* politics and an aseptic, apolitical University, immune to all manners of politics. Between these opposing extremes, there lies an intermediate space defined by the idiosyncratic condition of what pertains to the University¹⁰. Such a space is not bound in by the contents of the discussions it harbors: everything can be examined under the magnifying glass of University criticism¹¹, and this includes the most typical forms of national and international party politics. This universal principle of University thought constitutes an inviolable University principle.

And yet, the *university form of politics* must first and foremost be *substantiated* with reference to such items as those where the University *may be endowed with political capacity*¹²; that is to say, it must have the right of acting effectively as a public partenaire of both the State and the society. In this sense, *substantiation* means achieving a specifically political status while refusing both the classic value-neutrality of academic apolitical behavior as well as the formal, empty politics that upholds the notion of *power for the sake of power* that has characterized our university

⁹ In this sense, Pedro Krotsch differentiates between “partidization” as an expression of heteronomous politics at the university, and “politization”, which the author accepts as legitimate in the academic sphere. See P. Krotsch, in Analía Roffo. *Entrevista con Pedro Krotsch*. Buenos Aires, *Clarín*, August 25, 2002. While the notion of politization requires more precision, which is one of the aims of this study, the idea of “partidization” depends much more on intuition, judging from recent university events. Among others, UBA provides well known examples of passages from university militancy to party bureaucracy and the other way around, particularly among *radicales* during Schuberoff's prolonged term of office. Along different lines, but subjected to similar criticism, the Comisión Nacional de Evaluación y Acreditación Universitaria (CONEAU), destined to play a controversial role in the systemic reconstruction of the Argentinean University, was immediately perceived as the apple of discord as from its creation by the Law of Higher Education passed in 1995. In accordance with item 47 of the said Law, the CONEAU is composed by six (6) *members proposed by the National Legislative* [sic] over a total of twelve (12) members (!). Thus, half its members are appointed from national party politics apparatuses, with no academic requirements except “acknowledged academic and scientific reputation”, and this is to be decided ultimately by the Executive (!), which ultimately ratifies on the proposition made up by legislators. This is a manner of clearing a party bargaining that was already in operation within the bureaucracy of university management. The paradox lies in the fact that the same technocracy that favored the Law and, therefore, the subsequent political bargaining, bragged that it had put an end to the “anachronistic” politization of the national university. Lastly, Dr. Oscar Shuberoff's four consecutive terms of office at the head of the UBA (i.e., sixteen years ruling the university) are an incontrovertible sign that hegemonic policies were carried out and cleared in our university. If we compare such behavior with what happened in medieval universities –at a time when nothing was nearly as transparent and democratic as our advanced modernity prides itself on –we find that the Rectors of those days stayed in office for four months at the Sorbonne and for a year at the University of Bologna. See J. Verger. *Les universités au moyen âge*, París, Presses Universitaires de France, 1973, p. 52.

¹⁰ As we shall see later on, this notion is related to Habermas's concept of the university's *political capacity*, with specific attributes and limitations, even when it implies a wide range of social, ethical, and political consequences in the ordinary world. See J. Habermas. *Teoría y praxis. Estudios de filosofía social*, Madrid, Editorial Tecnos, 1997, pp. 335 to 350 and 351 to 359.

¹¹ In this sense, see the declaration of the university's unconditioned nature in Jacques Derrida's last publication about the university: J. Derrida. *L'Université sans condition*. París, Galilée, 2001.

¹² See J. Habermas. *Op. cit.*

political forms for the past two decades. What I mean is that, although the University can *freely* discuss *every issue*, this does not imply that every issue has the same political value for a *university form of politics*. For example, while it is true that the University is entitled to discuss and/or call into question a given party practice of some national or international political movement, it does not follow that the University itself can become either a political party, or an NGO, or a State. But the fact that the University discusses policies related to knowledge legitimizes its status as a model and first rate political counterweight regarding the definition of a political agenda of knowledge. Therefore, an agenda of *knowledge policies*, at every level and in every aspect, ranging from its social function and its ethical consequences to its production and national organization, offer a privileged threshold on which the University must find *political capacity*. In such societies in which knowledge has become the main productive force, policies of knowledge acquire an enormous, radical potentiality for conflict, and it is with reference to this that the *university form of politics* finds a privileged substance in a globalized world.

While it is a commonplace that the *university form of politics* is basically grounded on policies of knowledge and their respective agendas, one cannot but wonder at the lack of the corresponding debate, both in the history of university representation in our great national universities and in the militant practice of university actors¹³. As regards the State, it tends to ignore the university's role as its *partenaire* when it comes to defining policies of knowledge, thus imitating the informed decisionism that has become a generalized feature of neoliberal globalization. This makes the militant university agenda a prey to mystification by a sovereignism of internal vocation, preparing it for a university politics that is misunderstood as the *microcosm* of the State's sovereign policy and, consequently, to be defined through a formal struggle for power within the University, following an agenda that involves strategies of hegemony, domination, and bureaucratic reproduction. There is a very narrow gap between this formal and empty struggle for power which is very typical to current leftist activism and the current bureaucratization of universities governance under the administrativist turn, with its typical emptiness and lack of meaning; and Argentinean university politics repeatedly crosses this gap.

Listing down all the aspects of the *agenda* in which the University is capable of taking political action and that should therefore substantiate the notion of a *university form of politics* exceeds the scope of this paper. Neither is it advisable to advance unilaterally –*monologically*– a list of priorities in the various items that compose the agenda. We can only quote examples, likenesses, and vague family resemblances which, in Wittgenstein's way, might give us some idea of the notion at stake. Thus, everything related to our work at the University, its social, ethical, and political consequences, its procedural modes in the corresponding scientific and didactic fields, and the sole idea of the University's mission and functions will determine an agenda to substantiate the *university form of politics*. Examples of the above can be found in university teaching policies, relations between admission and graduation, attrition rates, State budgets for teaching and research, tools granted for the advancement of university education, and the concept of university education and training apart from other manners of higher education appear as true apples of discord in such domains as the University can act upon. These very same things fill certain *university forms of politics* with content. The singular features of the University and of a *university form of higher education*¹⁴, such as the way in which the Argentinean university system is ruled, external

¹³ In the team study that we conducted about democracy in the UBA we had already pointed out the striking indifference to policies of knowledge, expressed *indirectly* in the descriptions of ordinary discussions in collegiate milieus, provided by the representatives we interviewed, and patent from their own manifestations and expressions of anxiety. See F. Naishtat et al. *Democracia y representación en la universidad. El caso de la Universidad de Buenos Aires desde la visión de sus protagonistas*. Buenos Aires, Editorial Biblos, 2005, pp. 33 to 80.

¹⁴ See J. Habermas. "The Idea of the University: learning processes", in *The New Conservatism. Cultural Criticism and the Historians' Debate*. Cambridge, MIT Press, 1991.

evaluation, and legal regulation of national universities are the security combination to resist *decharacterization*¹⁵; i.e., functional dispersion and systemic dysfunction that, for the past decades, has been degrading the University, showing it as an institution despised by both scientific and educational policies. Likewise, the University's internal statutes and agreements, its modes of political representation, and the ways in which it exercises its organic and external autonomy are an essential component of the areas where university politics operate.

Once we have understood that, unlike general politics, this *university form of politics* is outlined within a sphere of sense and contents that are specific to the University, but whose general social and political consequences go beyond the scope of the University, we have not exhausted the difficulties with University politics; for contents with some political sense are also consistent with sovereignty or its political derivatives with their hegemonic moods. At most, we could have pointed out that University politics in Argentina, by contrast with a meaningful university politics, had been depleted of sense and lack any critical content, but any content of value, on the other hand, could be rewrapped with strategic forms of political construction, as is typically the case with substantive forms of hegemonic politics. In order to argue against all forms of domination and hegemony at the University it is necessary to go beyond the set boundaries, and get to understand the *critical* nature as an intrinsic constituent of the university form of politics.

In Hobbes' *Leviathan*, (chapter 26), we read his well-known formula *Auctoritas, non veritas facit legem*. This is what Carl Schmitt has used since 1933 as the generative principle of political decisionism and sovereignty¹⁶. For the specific sphere of the University, we could adopt the inverted formula produced by Habermas in 1962, in the context of his early reflections on *Historia y crítica de la opinión pública*, through his statement *Veritas, non auctoritas facit legem*¹⁷. Although this may echo Plato or Kant, Derrida's notion of deconstruction allows us to think, free from dogmatic nuances, of a concept of truth applicable to University politics as a principle of *unconditioned* criticism, which removes the University issue from the realm of strategic logic inherent to ordinary performative and political decisionism. The point here is to set a boundary that is intrinsic to the *university form of politics* so that it can make it immune, at least from a regulatory perspective, to the construction of domination and hegemony. Such a boundary could be thought out from Derrida's notion of *deconstruction*, in the sense that university politics does not simply intend attainment of the state of things in the world, but tends to achieve this vocation only if the said state of things favors genealogical and critical *deconstruction* of domination, or of a fold or hint of concealed domination. In short, it has to do with an enabling action referred to the release of human capabilities rather than with the mere good use of such capabilities in a given dogmatic direction, stated in accordance with whatever principle of authority. Hence, the *university form of politics* is incompatible with any reduction of politics to unity and sovereignty, and is possible and conceivable only through the polyphonic, contradictory, and uncompromising form of pluralism that constitutes its essence. The *university form of politics* must even watch and guarantee this kind of pluralism wherever it is exercised. This is the tradition that lacks in the current university politics and that we have to rebuild in order to make possible a true reform and not just some cosmetic arrangements.

Now, moving backwards from the institutional crisis and the questioned statutes, we may wonder whether there is a *form of politics in the university* that has slowly become solidified and reified until it reached the status of a structure of power signified from political sovereignty. The

¹⁵ For the notion of university, I borrow Horacio González's use of the term *decharacterization* to refer to the present situation of academic philosophy. See H. González. "Filosofía académica y esfera pública en la Argentina actual", in *ADEF. Revista de Filosofía*. Volume XV, # 1. May 2000, p. 134.

¹⁶ "It is authority, not truth, that makes the law". See T. Hobbes. *Leviathan*. Mexico, Fondo de Cultura Económica Editorial 1940; and C. Schmitt. *Teología política. Cuatro ensayos sobre la soberanía*. Buenos Aires, Editorial Struhart, 2005.

¹⁷ "It is truth, not authority, that makes the law". See J. Habermas. *Historia y crítica de la opinión pública*. Barcelona, Editorial Gustavo Gili, 1981.

authorities' institutional stagnation over the past two decades can be explained mostly through policies that bureaucratically reproduced hegemony and domination inside the University. With regard to students' *decisionism*, which rejects the composition of the University Assembly and the opening of an institutional debate about reform dealing with the University we have and the University we want, there seems to be a desire to continue exercising the *power of veto*, with the sole purpose of negotiating future spaces of power and sectoral distribution in the University. These forms of university politics are diametrically opposed to the *university form of politics*. Thanks to the ambiguity of our *demos*¹⁸ tradition, to what extent has our *university form of politics* avoided colonization by a form of politics that seeks hegemony and sovereignism?

The "colonization" of the University form of politics could not be recognized if one did not bear in mind the slow erosion of the Argentinean *university demos* through the corrosive effects of the systemic and mercantilistic turn taken by education. This state of things took root in the shade of neoliberal globalization, weakening the political space of an academic autonomy defined by unconditioned criticism and by what Derrida called "*professing the truth*". In fact, the heteronomy of a university *demos* cracked by the market bears a functional affinity with the heteronomy of a *demos* tugged at by a political form that has been losing its critical sharpness to the attraction of the practice of power. Seen thus, the crisis does not affect only the two major universities that we have mentioned, although it is in these two that it has reached greater visibility. Other important national universities, such as the National Universities of Córdoba and La Plata, which share their institutional tradition, dating back to the Reform of 1918, with the UBA and the National University of Comahue, show –to different degrees –visible signs of potential conflict and internal obstructions. Moreover, universities in other countries, such as Mexico's UNAM^{***}, are undergoing or have already undergone serious internal crises and fractures that crystallized in 1999¹⁹, during a strike that lasted one whole year. Also, although far from the public scandal protagonized by university politics at UBA and Comahue, the new universities established in the aftermath of the Law of Higher Education (1995) show a peace that is not supposed to be found in an atmosphere of university democracy, the peace that seems more typical of private universities, quite different from the critical spirit, dimmed as it now is, of the public university. In these universities, the notion of "these things are not to be discussed" has replaced the uproar of our great universities, and silence is both the bond and the guarantee with which the Law of Higher Education expects to counteract the *university form of politics*. Lastly, on an international scale, there ring the intellectual voices that ever more loudly denounce the profound crisis affecting university autonomy through a systematic

¹⁸ The University Reform Preliminary Manifesto, entitled "La Juventud de Córdoba a los hombres libres de Sud-América", introduced, for the first time in a discourse on university autonomy, the word *demos*, thus crossing the corporative border that had been inherited from medieval tradition. However, at least from a rhetorical point of view, it remained caught inside the classic register of sovereignty: "(...) the university *demos*, sovereignty, the right to choose a government for ourselves lies mostly in the students". See FUBA. *Op. cit.*, p. 12. However, the discourse of student sovereignty was immediately counteracted by the recommendations issued during the first reformist national encounter. I am referring to the First University Students' National Conference held in Córdoba one month after the events of June 1918. In the report made by the Ruling Board of the said encounter, and drafted by Guillermo Watson, the representative of Buenos Aires University Federation, we read the following: "In order to prevent the creation of cliques and exclude imbalance of powers, the Commission believes that the only suitable system is one that may avoid, in the ruling bodies, the dominance of any one university 'states' ". See FUBA. *Op. cit.*, p. 29. See also F. Naishtat. "La crisis institucional de la UBA. Una crisis del demos universitario". Buenos Aires, *Ciencias Sociales* magazine, 2006.

^{***} Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.

¹⁹ I have referred to the UNAM crisis in F. Naishtat et al. *Op. cit.*

delegitimization of the university, its actors, and the critical space pertaining to the academic-and-university realm²⁰.

Conclusions

The institutional crisis affecting both of our universities can be understood only within the tradition of Argentinean university democracy, the *university demos*, and the old conquest of tripartite rule. Apart from institutional agreements that were explicitly called into question, what has been left unsaid about this crisis lies in a form of university politics, sheltered by the same ambiguities that impinge on our democratic university tradition; the ‘unsaid’ is at the bottom of the crisis. That the ambiguities of our democratic university tradition date back to the origin of the Reform of 1918 can be clearly seen from the very Preliminary Manifesto, when it makes a point about democracy in terms of sovereignty, and endows students more than any other group with the said sovereignty. However, the ambiguity comes to light when ensuing manifestos by the same Reform movement and its chief actors rectify the emphatic notion of students’ sovereignty and reformulate university government in terms of an organic harmony among the three classic components of the tripartite system and its vocation for debate and solidarity. However, in the meantime, an ambiguous concept of university politics has been left adrift. Depending on the different cycles of Argentinean politics, the concept will grow stronger or weaker. The ambiguity swings between a classic, universal notion of sovereignty and a notion of deliberative politics without a vocation for continued strategic dominance.

Having said this, and drawing attention to the ambiguity that triggers chronic conflict among normative and valorative components of Argentinean university action, it is in order to consider a wider scenario and envisage the global-scale systemic weakening of critical forms and university intellectual resistance to the hegemonic ways of the market and the political powers that claim domination of the university. This continual weakening is translated into a depletion of university politics, which thus begins to combine the most mercantilistic forms of knowledge with the most strategic forms of politics, in a cycle of elective affinity that was clearly visible to critical and empirical scrutiny, though not always suspected by those involved in it.

However, the *Argentinean university demos* contains an extraordinary wealth of contents and is always a source of sense for the articulation of critical forms of resistance that contribute to the *university form of politics*. In contrast to their Anglo Saxon counterparts with an apolitical tradition, Argentinean universities with a reformist tradition enjoy a matchless political and moral advantage, for their organic structure does not intend to break up an academic body which remained aseptic and scientifically neutral, with an administrative representation based on entrepreneurship and lobbyism. By bringing together in one single body both the organic and the external autonomy of the university, the vocation of the Argentinean tradition places the *res politica* at the center of the academic issue, positing in a natural manner a space for the university’s ethical and political responsibility, its social function, its democratic function, and its moral nature. This is why it has always been more difficult to lead our national universities to highly social, elitist and plutocratic ways that come quite naturally to Anglo Saxon universities²². This is also why the various authoritarian governments have always made it their first objective to demolish the national University, which they always deemed a central place to danger and rebellion, as we are now reminded by the fortieth anniversary of the Noche de los Bastones Largos [the Night of the Long Sticks], so timely remembered at the critical moment the UBA is undergoing at present.

²⁰ B. Sousa Santos. *La universidad en el siglo XXI. Para una reforma democrática y emancipadora de la universidad*. Buenos Aires, Miño y Dávila Editores, 2005; and also R. Bernstein. “Respuestas al cuestionario UBACyT S090 acerca de la universidad”. *Mimeo*. Buenos Aires, 2006.

This comparative advantage, which should count on our public universities as creative and critical permanent resources to feed our democratic immunological system to keep it resistant to all those forms of alienation and domination bent on inhibiting human capabilities and liberties, is overturned inside our public universities at a serious disadvantage even on comparison with the aseptic universities of the North. This is a consequence of our forms of university politics becoming parasitical and feeding on a form of power which, *intra muros*, reproduces the hegemony and domination typical of systemic politics. It is not from the naive position pertaining to a virtuous, noble, or courteous politics that I propose to fight such state of things by *finding anew a university form of politics*. When it comes to a domination politics in the university, the solution does not consist in going back to the old ethics of political virtue, or to think of eradicating interests, conflicts, or passions, not even inside the university. The issue lies in understanding that, as far as university matters are concerned, the conflicts, the interests, and the passions start from a specific threshold and tradition which constrains university politics in a particular way, making it incompatible with other forms of politics exercised in the society.

I thus put forth my conceptual proposal against *reductionism* of democratic notions and politics for the sake of an all-encompassing universal matrix²¹. This is a good moment to turn to Aristotle: the being, as such, is named in a number of different and incompatible ways. But it is a good moment too to resort to young Hegel in Jena²²: in order to understand human sociality we start from a threshold of natural ethicity from where conflicts become dialectically potentialized rather than from a Hobbesian universal actor whose only tools are a rational kit of speculation and interests. At the University, the said natural ethicity poses the idea of a first threshold of special features from where the *university form of politics* will shape its character. By establishing special features, could we be immunizing the university community, in the sense of an *Inmunitas* withdraws from otherness²³? It is rather the opposite case: it is only through an immunizing type of prerogative, characteristic of the university, that a true commerce with the other of the university becomes a fertile boundary of cultivation (*limes*) and a shared place for interpellation and co-responsibility. Thus, progress on the matter of statutes and on breaking through the crisis requires that we take upon ourselves the *university form of politics*. The necessary condition to resolve the institutional crisis in a way that is compatible with university autonomy requires that the notion of political university culture be placed in the center of criticism.

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²¹ For example, Beatriz Sarlo's notion of democracy is *reductionist*. Sarlo opposes what she calls *university meritocracy* to all forms of democracy, and recommends separating them once and for all, without taking into account that, in the university, democracy can be combined with particular features under a *deliberative democracy* rather than a *sovereign democracy*, viewing it as a regulatory, approximative "self-inspiration" rather than as a rule of arithmetic equality. A lack of arithmetic equality at the university does not mean that the institution lacks two fundamental, normative forms of democracy, already in operation: a) the form which, ever since Aristotle, moralists have highlighted as the intrinsic bond between the fair and the equal ("deal with similar cases in a similar way") and, b) seek maximum responsible participation of all those involved in the discussion and decision of shared political issues. In this sense, the view of Chilean biologist Humberto Maturana about university democracy as "self-inspiration" refutes Sarlo's rather reductionist view, without diminishing her fair appreciation of the potential possibilities of UBA. See B. Sarlo. "La universidad es un tipo especial de institución". Buenos Aires, *Clarín*, July 12, 2006. See also H. Maturana. "Gobierno universitario como co-inspiración", in C. Cox (Comp.). *Formas de gobierno en la educación superior: nuevas perspectivas*. Santiago de Chile, FLACSO, 1990.

²² On young Hegel and the Hegel v. Hobbes controversy from the threshold of ethicity where the struggles for recognition and differentiation rise, see A. Honneth. *La lucha por el reconocimiento. Por una gramática moral de los conflictos sociales*. Barcelona, Editorial Grijalbo, 1997.

²³ On community, immunity, and immunization, see R. Espósito. *Inmunitas. Protección y negación de la vida*. Buenos Aires, Editorial Amorrortu, 2006.

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