

## Towards the Post-University: Experimenting with Psychoanalysis and Institutions

Benjamín Mayer Foulkes

*Mediating Culture Machine's second volume, The University Culture Machine (2000)*

The following interview with Benjamín Mayer Foulkes seeks to both update and reinvigorate a debate that was entered into by *Culture Machine's second volume, The University Culture Machine* (2000). In his contribution to that volume, 'The Future of the Humanities: Experimenting', Samuel Weber identified the contemporary challenge to the University and the Humanities as being fundamentally conceptual in nature. The challenge, for Weber, was to rethink the concept of the human that both institutions had come to embody, namely, a Cartesian model of the subject that relies on three basic assumptions: distance from social life; privileged access to universal truths; and the unification of knowledge. According to Weber, it was by retaining these assumptions that the University and the Humanities had rendered themselves instrumental to capitalist hegemony in the era of globalisation and multiculturalism. At the same time, he observed that modern technology had induced a crisis in the foundational notion of the human *qua* producer of knowledge in accordance with Cartesian assumptions. Hence the question about the future of the Humanities, which Weber answered by means of a contrast between the traditional human sciences and the philosophical tradition associated with deconstruction. The future would lie, he argued, in a deconstructive rethinking of the human in terms of 'iterability', a notion implying both the ontological impossibility of the Cartesian model and an ethical affirmation of such an impossibility. Invoking both Kierkegaard and Derrida, Weber described deconstructive Humanities in terms of 'experimenting' with figures and performativity. While his argument remains as persuasive today as it was fourteen years ago, a theoretical vindication of 'experimenting' within the University has not debunked the model of subjectivity that underpins it. Nor has it disarticulated the instrumental role of the University in contemporary capitalism. It therefore seems pertinent to reopen the question as to how 'experimenting' with figures and performativity may lead toward new institutional practices beyond the Cartesian model of the subject that is upheld by the University. Benjamin Mayer Foulkes, a practicing psychoanalyst and the founder of [17, Instituto de Estudios Críticos](#), an independent Institute of Critical Theory in Mexico City, suggests one possible road for doing so lies in the articulation of deconstruction, psychoanalysis and the educational possibilities that are opened up by digital media.

**G.M.C.: Perhaps the best way to introduce 17, Institute of Critical Studies is through its own self-description as a space situated at the nexus or crossroads between the academic field, non-academic culture and psychoanalysis. I find it interesting that such a project coincides, at least chronologically, with the history of Culture Machine. Do you think there is an international tendency towards decentering the University as an exclusive site of critical thinking?**

B.M.F.: Even if they still respond to that name, we all know that universities have for the most part been transformed into instrumental, technological institutes. As Lyotard famously explained, what is at stake is nothing less than an essential shift in the nature of knowledge, now associated with efficiency rather than narrative. As a result, critical thinking has found it more and more difficult to take and retain a hold in most universities, which explains why so many alternative initiatives have sprung beyond their gates worldwide. Not accidentally, they are often led by people with connections to psychoanalysis. The trail followed by them is not unlike that of [17, Institute of Critical Studies](#). This is a good time to refer to our institute, the history of which is now long enough to allow for an overall review of the unfolding of the project. Established in Mexico City in 2001, its name refers to the street number of Victoria-Allee, where the *Institute für Sozialforschung* was located at the University of Frankfurt. Less known is that Horkheimer and his colleagues also promoted the establishment of a psychoanalytic clinic, which was active between 1930 and 1933. 17 thus appeals to the relation between the critical and the clinical, not least through its accredited postgraduate programmes in Critical Theory, which accommodate innovative research in the fields of Literature, Philosophy, Art, Political Thought and Psychoanalysis. Our method combines online work with two international colloquia per year in which all students converge. We have organized 18 colloquia since 2006, and it is worth stressing that they have been public events that will continue to play a pivotal role in our formal plan to extend all aspects of our critical work to the fields of 'disability', gender, law, management, cultural management, visuality,

media, curating, translation, religion, history, violence and peace, urban and environmental studies. In addition to our postgraduate programmes, we host a wide range of other courses, both online and offline; we edit our own publications, develop cultural projects, and offer consultancy on the basis of our experience and pursuits.

I conceived this project out of impatience with what I experienced and observed around me. I felt - and still feel - unsatisfied with the nature of universities in Mexico and the Spanish-speaking world, as they are neither canonical nor avant-garde. Their relation to tradition is as tenuous as their relation to the contemporary, which is why in Mexico the cultural circuit has never had too much respect for university-types, a fact that in turn reduces the possibilities for change within the University. One of the aims of 17 is to break this vicious circle by multiplying the communicating vessels between the non-academic cultural sphere, the scholarly milieu, and psychoanalysis. If I initially set out to establish the Institute on my own, this was due to the fact that I found it too much of an effort to persuade others that this initiative was not only worthwhile, but also possible. Of course I was often asked, how I could be certain that what I had in mind was not simply quixotic. Yet I believe that the question of the University is too important to be left to the academics. The contemporary crisis of this venerable institution provides an opportunity to reconsider its nature and aims radically. In this regard, the temporal coincidence with *Culture Machine* is of course interesting, but I'm also thinking about a generation of cultural, editorial, educational, artistic and even alternatively commercial projects in Mexico of more or less the same age, say between 12 and 17 years old. These are initiatives that have essentially developed outside the sphere of the State, implying a repositioning before the State in the aftermath of the Zapatista uprising of 1994 and the presumable end of one-party rule since 2000. In this context, I think they can be seen as supplements to State institutions as well as the private sector.

**G.M.C.: Up to a certain point, the philosophical underpinnings of the University are shared between Europe, North America and Latin American countries such as Mexico. Before we get to that, however, I would like to consider other dimensions of the University that might be necessary to contextualise 17 as a project 'beyond' the University. Can you expand your diagnosis of the University specifically in the Mexican context?**

B.M.F.: In Mexico, public and private universities are governed by a corporatist logic that is inherent to the national political regime, and which essentially prevents them from undertaking meaningful social agendas. Our institutions of higher education do not really respond to the concerns of citizens that, historically speaking, hardly deserve that name. By a corporatist logic, I refer to the texture of the political regime resulting from the Mexican Revolution (1910), which organized society into State-controlled corporations, formulated a nationalist ideology and thereby implanted a model that has benefited an elite which grows smaller and smaller. We lack a State that is truly committed to redistributing power, and that can mediate effectively between the very diverse strata of society. What we do have are economic rules that maintain and increase all sorts of monopolies. There is therefore a generalized sense of difficulty to access resources and achieve autonomy. Now, I remember that in the 1990s when I was a student in the UK I saw a theatre play dealing with the fact that 7% of the British population controlled 84% of national wealth. (Today, the wealthiest 1% of the population in the UK own the same as the poorest 55%, while the world's richest 85 people are as wealthy as the poorest 50%, population, 35 billion, combined.) That is a little better than what we have, but the structure is not so different. It thus turns out that the Mexican case is actually paradigmatic of a global trend towards the concentration of wealth and of an inability of the University to effectively reverse that structural tendency.

**G.M.C.: If Mexican society is dominated by a logic of political and economic monopolisation that the University has been so far been unable to have much impact upon, how can a small Institute of Critical Studies intervene in such a complex situation? How can such an Institute even survive in an era choked by the imperatives of efficiency and profit?**

B.M.F.: In Mexico we face the great paradox that radical work is more viable as a private agent, since a public agent is automatically co-opted by the logic of the State. Certain groups of intellectuals flag their causes in the name of the public university, yet from my point of view what they actually manage to do (however unwittingly) is set up a smoke-screen that benefits the hegemony of particular political factions. My own alternative to this phenomenon, which is reflected in 17, has to do with what I call *critical entrepreneurship*. This is different to private entrepreneurship, which in the Spanish-speaking world is ideologically very conservative (often having ties to the Catholic Church), and in practice does not think of anything beyond the maximization of yields. Instead of pursuing the traditional increase of profits, critical entrepreneurship starts from the assumption that the economy is a form of sociality, and so the leading voice within it is undertaken by social, educational, cultural or subjective aims (which are of course always

debatable and should therefore remain open to public debate). Thus, we are not promoters of privatization; rather, we situate ourselves in the terrain of social organizations that assume some of the functions that the State is either unwilling to assume or is effectively incapable of assuming. In this context, the State provides resources – however limited – so that individuals and groups can assume those functions precisely through what I call critical entrepreneurship.

**G.M.C.: That reminds me of a book by George Yúdice, *The Expediency of Culture*, in which the author analyses several cases of cultural agents who assume tasks previously controlled by the state in order to soften the impact of neoliberal policies. Yúdice is not entirely optimistic about such phenomenon, and perhaps we should be problematizing its instantiation in higher education. How can independent initiatives such as 17 become something more than a crutch for the neoliberal state, and achieve working conditions at least equivalent to those of the University in better times?**

B.M.F.: The withdrawal of the State and the transformation of universities into what are in effect technological institutes in the Lyotardian sense in fact both speak of the same phenomenon. A university that has been transformed into a technological institute may continue to call itself a university, but it is no longer so. The emergence of peripheral and marginal institutes such as ours constitutes a very clear response to that state of affairs in terms of the valorisation and the keeping of modalities of knowledge that can no longer find space in so-called universities. The challenge remains, of course, of making this critical practice sustainable. If we take into account what ordinarily happens in Mexico, our institutional consolidation would depend on two possible scenarios: to link up with the state or with a strong economic group. I find neither of these alternatives interesting, and so a question opens up regarding which alliances to strike (and how) in order to promote an organizational consolidation that is effectively different from the classical ones. Now, what I find most interesting is how initiatives such as ours make evident that even prior to economics and politics, the social is a libidinal tissue. A broad spectrum of social thinkers and researchers may disagree with this, yet in a world in which inherited perspectives are increasingly incapable of addressing the most urgent problems, the traditional narratives of political economy have been displaced by perspectives that effectively account for the social in libidinal terms. The traditional University, by the way, has been practically incapable of working with the libidinal substratum of the social within its own spaces. There, the libidinal is seen as a sort of circumstantial element that most of the time obstructs the proper development of work – for instance, it interrupts the thesis and takes it towards inadequate objects of study: that is, objects of study that do not fit into disciplinary formations. We, by contrast, are interested in that which is the source of the most intimate concerns; our orientation is toward the event. In a sense we *tympanize* (as Derrida used to say) classical academic work, precisely by means of that subjective ink whose unfolding we endeavour to host so that it manages to express itself as a writing project that can materialize as an event. The writing project must be an event in the first place for its author, who must be surprised, displaced and able to move on from the series of repetitions from which he or she has emerged. Generally speaking, when this is achieved, the event is also a social event, since the author exists socially, in relation to issues or groups that have a collective existence.

**G.M.C: Talking about the social relevance of research, of the desire to intervene by 'tympanizing' classical academic discourse, I would like to ask you: why 'Critical Theory' rather than, for example, 'Cultural Studies'? How does that choice respond to the specificity of knowledge formations in the Mexican context?**

B.M.F.: I appreciate the ability of Cultural Studies to legitimise objects of study that were previously ignored or rejected by academia. However, I deliberately decided that we would offer a postgraduate programme on Critical Theory, not on Cultural Studies. My decision had to do with the impression, around the year 2000, that Cultural Studies presented itself as an empiricist response to Critical Theory, which was in turn figured as an abstract, elitist discourse. I think there is a very toxic anti-theoretical streak in our culture, particularly in Mexican culture but more generally in the Hispanic world. It appears as a sort of apology of empiricism, but it is an anti-intellectual practice that tinges broad sections of our Leftist thinking. I regard this as a catastrophe. I view the contempt for theory as suicidal, and so rather than making a concession that at the time appeared to me as populist, I placed my bet on a Critical Theory that was committed to the complexity of debates. Also in those years I learned about certain positions, such as that of Alberto Moreiras, suggesting that Cultural Studies had died on September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, leaving us with a relativizing cultural perspective that was in some sense promising but also very poor in theoretical and analytical terms. I felt that Critical Theory could provide a more consistent articulation with the more visible roots of the philosophical canon. This is not to dismiss popular culture or the perspectives that may derive from it, which I think are perfectly welcome in Critical Theory. In this regard, we need to take into account that in Spanish, Critical Theory is

still too tightly associated with the Frankfurt School, whereas we are assuming a widening of the field that took place in English. One of our bets is indeed on the re-signification of Critical Theory specifically for the contemporary Spanish-speaking world. We openly ask ourselves which notion of Critical Theory we can deploy in a pertinent way, as opposed to doing antiquarian work. I think this question is not only important but can also result in concrete projects that are relevant to our medium. It allows us to go beyond intellectual filiation and to remember that we are not in the business of being the representatives or the legatees of anybody, and so we support a renewed, relevant theoretical praxis that maintains an intense dialogue with contemporary psychoanalysis. Our conceptual efforts seek embodiment in all manner of concrete expressions that allow us to go beyond the usual academic forms and rituals of filiation. Our undertaking aspires to kindle events.

**G.M.C.: Culture Machine's second volume was dedicated to dispelling narrow (mis)understandings of deconstruction as an abstract, purely linguistic exercise done by academics comfortably sitting in Comparative Literature chairs in the United States. It seems to me that, after many years, such misunderstandings persist. At the same time, a project like 17 presents itself to us as a fully embodied deconstructive exercise. What does psychoanalysis contribute to this particular embodiment of deconstruction?**

B.M.F.: At 17 we raise, from a perspective informed by Lacanian psychoanalysis, the question of deconstruction as a particular kind of discourse, or social bond. Before pursuing the project of the Institute, I pondered the relation between deconstruction and psychoanalysis. I was particularly drawn to two questions: how might Lacan's Discourse of the Analyst unfold in a social dimension? And how might we account for the nature of deconstruction as a particular social bond in the vocabulary displayed by Lacan *à propos* his 'Four Discourses'? Whereas the difference between deconstruction and psychoanalysis is often underlined, I tend to emphasize their affinities. Derrida's outline of a university without condition, the primordial right to say it all, and to make it public even under the form of fiction, is clearly related to psychoanalytic free association. The Institute can broadly be thought of as oriented along psychoanalytic lines, which therefore allow all those involved with it to consolidate new signifiers and articulations of their desire. But how?

In contrast to the widespread misreading of deconstruction that still sees in it a variety of relativism, I emphasize its quasi-foundational capacity. Language being the primordial institution, 17 can be conceived first and foremost as a discursive inscription, an attempt to articulate organizationally a certain understanding of deconstruction as a social bond. The Discourse of Deconstruction would have a common point of departure with the Discourse of the Analyst: *plus-de-jour* as Lacan conceived it. It is not accident that Freud and Lacan refer to psychoanalysis as the practice of the impossible, while Derrida describes deconstruction as the experience of the impossible. The difference is that in the Discourse of the Analyst, *plus-de-jour* is directed towards the subject of the unconscious, while in deconstruction it is directed towards the general order of signifiers that Lacan calls Knowledge (*savoir*). There is of course an intimate relation between signifiers and subjects, insofar as, following Lacan's proposition, the latter would be 'represented' by the former before other signifiers, which in turn 'represent' other subjects.

In order better to transmit his 'Four Discourses', Lacan furnished certain notations, which I here take up for my present purposes in simplified form:

Lacan's description of the general form of Discourses

Agent	---	>	Other
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Truth			Production

Where:

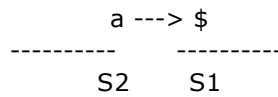
a = Plus-de-jour (the residual *par excellence*, i.e. that which cannot take the form of a signifier, nor can be assimilated subjectively either).

\$ = Subject (i.e. the Subject of the unconscious).

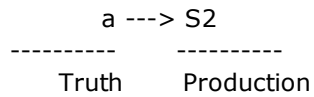
S1 = Master Signifier (a signifier temporarily able to represent the generality of signifiers, or a certain number of them).

S2 = Knowledge (the generality of signifiers; also, S2 is a common signifier, as distinguished from S1).

Discourse of the Analyst (Lacan):

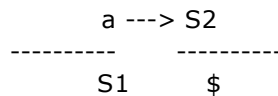


General form of the Discourse of Deconstruction (my own suggestion):

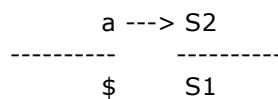


The two varieties of Deconstructive Discourse (my suggestion):

Discourse of Deconstruction (I)  
Subjectivity-Producing Variant



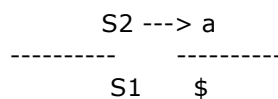
Discourse of Deconstruction (II)  
Signifier-Producing Variant



The Discourse of Deconstruction has two variants. The doubling of this Discourse is correlative to its undecidable character insofar as it implies the displacement of signifiers (a à S2) as much as their reinstatement (the 'production' of S1). Deconstruction 'bites its own tail': were it to become standardized as Knowledge (S2), it would be prone to its self-displacement (a à S2). Yet this never-ending movement of displacement *of itself* has an instituting effect (i.e. the aforementioned 'production' of S1). The Subjectivity-Producing Variant of deconstruction allows for the rekindling of desire. For its part, the Signifier-Producing Variant, as illustrated in the course of deconstructive readings and interventions by the establishment of quasi-transcendentals, signals the institutive capacity of deconstruction at the very moment in which it displaces metaphysical logics and constructs.

As concerns knowledge in the ordinary sense (*connaissance*, which is in turn a form of *savoir*), 17 thus operates as a post-University. If, for structural reasons, the illusions of Absolute Knowledge still lurk beneath the University (as annotated in Lacan's respective Discourse: S2 à a), the point of departure of the post-University (as based on the Discourse of Deconstruction: a à S2) is the very impossibility of Absolute Knowledge. The Discourse of Deconstruction thus inverts the sequence, and the relation, between Knowledge and *plus-de-jouir* that defines the Discourse of the University.

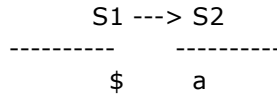
Discourse of the University



Even though the Discourse of the University puts dogmas into question (S1 in the position of Truth, which is for Lacan that which Knowledge *lacks*), its main thrust is the reduction of the residual (S2 à a). So in spite of itself, its *conception* of Truth takes the form of such a Master Signifier. It is precisely on account of its impossibility that the specter of Absolute Knowledge haunts the University. By contrast, the Signifier-Producing Variant of the Discourse of Deconstruction, whose form of Truth is in turn associated with castration (\$), gives forth Signifiers of the Lack of the Other (the lack constitutive of any set of signifiers, and therefore of discourse itself, written by Lacan: S[~~A~~]), rather than straight, 'pre-Deconstructive', metaphysical Master Signifiers. Such an affirmation presupposes the distinction between the quasi-Master Signifier 'produced' by the Discourse of Deconstruction, and the metaphysical Master Signifiers (S1) that preside Lacan's inscription of the Discourse of the Master, which describes the both religion and politics as social *liens* while it articulates his proposition that a 'Signifier represents a Subject to another Signifier'; since

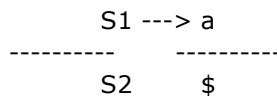
this relay of 'representation' is not without slippage, residual *plus-de-jour* (a) is its Production:

Discourse of the Master (Lacan)



If Lacan's register of the Real supposes the limits of possible symbolization, the Signifiers of the Lack of the Other that consign this fact take on a particular significance for the subject. These are the signifiers that allow us ultimately to deal with loss. Therefore, insofar as the post-University is not regulated by an Ideal (a metaphysical S1) but rather by a Signifier that consigns the lack in the Other (S [A]), it takes up the (impossible) task of situating itself within, and in relation to, the infinite reach of finitude. Now, I understand the post-University as a particular embodiment of the Discourse of Deconstruction, taken as a double social bond. Therefore the post-University must not only be contrasted with the University, wherever it might still be found, but also with that into which the universities have mutated, i.e. institutes of technology. Lacan's Discourse of the University can no longer describe its workings. So how might the Institute of Technology be described using Lacan's own terms? Following his tentative derivation of Lacan's Discourse of the Capitalist (which involves the inversion of S1 and \$ with respect to the Discourse of the Master), I propose:

Discourse of Information



In this sort of social bond, Knowledge (S2) figures in the position of Truth: its traditional narrative character has been eclipsed, while the discrete —and ultimately non-articulable — unit of information (S1) reigns, its hegemony uncontested by more traditional forms of power. This is the context in which academics have been turned into workers for business. No surprise that such a regime of information produces particular forms of subjectivity (\$). The post-University must therefore be understood as a deconstructive response to the aforementioned shift in the nature of knowledge (S2), which is no longer that of *savoir*, but rather a peculiar form of *connaissance*, at once fragmentary and mutely authoritarian, insofar as its efficacy is its argumentation. The very starting-point of the Discourse of Deconstruction entails the affirmation of the endurance of *jouissance* as a correlate of the structural impossibility of full Knowledge. Such an affirmation is therefore inherent to the post-University, the significance of which is clear at a time when mainstream conceptions of power, and particularly of knowledge, remain persuaded of the feasibility of an absolute reduction of *jouissance*: a veritable re-edition of the faith in Absolute Knowledge, now in technological form.

**G.M.C.: How does your reading of the relation between deconstruction and psychoanalysis materialise at the level of pedagogy?**

B.M.F.: Pedagogically, our method takes recourse to online work, on the basis of a conception of the internet as a *writing machine*. E-learning is fashionable today, but it rarely works since it relies on a technological conception of the 'transmission of information'. In contrast, we promote the fertile displacement of reading and writing. Our conception of the internet as a *graphic dispositif* has far-reaching consequences for the growth, on this basis, of an epistolary community which is radically atheological insofar as it is presided over by writing as such. We propose to enact an articulation of Derridean *writing*, the digital, and a psychoanalytic disposition to listening. Under appropriate conditions, confrontation with the embodied manifestation of our own words (i.e. writing) is capable of producing proto-analytic effects (of course, online and off-). Our methodology allows for personal voices to mature, debates to become nuanced, and for projects and initiatives to make their way into the public sphere. The significance of this becomes clearer when we consider that in the Spanish-speaking world there is no essay-writing tradition at school. In this respect, the vocation of the Institute is ultimately quite classical, although it adds the singular contemporary capacity to incorporate the most diverse questions and genres. By comparison, the University seems narrow.

**G.M.C.: A while ago you said that language is the first institution and that reminds me of one of 17's projects which was called 'Critical Theory in Spanish'. I think it was Hannah Arendt who declared German to be good for philosophy while English was good language for politics. I might ask you what Spanish is good for but I think it would be more deconstructive to ask: how can we think Spanish in a non-essentialist way without irresponsibly exposing it to the violence of epistemic colonialism?**

B.M.F.: We are sometimes perceived as being Eurocentric, or at any rate insufficiently *Southern*, at 17. I find this simplistic. We of course owe ourselves to Mexico and Latin America in all their complexity and dense historical experience; and we situate our efforts in the wide horizons of the Spanish language, which today include the United States no less than Spain. The reality, however, is that we have not yet appropriated the implications of the experience of living in Spanish, or not in the same way as this has happened in English. We do not have, for instance, institutions that represent the Spanish-speaking world as a whole, except for the Royal Spanish Academy which rather has to do with a State-driven attempt to normalize the tongue. Such a lack does not mean that the Spanish language has been absent from the philosophy and politics that has been thought in German, English or French. In particular, it would be wrong to suppose that the Spanish language (*castellano* or Castilian) has not played a role in the development of Critical Theory. The financial sponsor of the Frankfurt School was an Argentinian man. His name has been conveniently abridged as 'Felix Weil' the better to Germanize it, yet Félix Lucio José Weil supported the Institute into the 1970s while pursuing an active career as a civil servant and public intellectual in South America. Before such brutal evidence as this, how can it be said that working with the Frankfurt School is simply an instance of eurocentrism? The critique of eurocentrism too often hinges on ideological simplifications whose ultimate purchase is to strengthen some instance of hegemony.

**G.M.C.: For the same reason, perhaps, the pro-Southern position can easily lend itself to assimilation by the University that complies with the ideological imperatives of the day. By contrast, you previously alluded to the University without condition as a domain where it is possible to say everything, and you also said that it is akin to the rule of psychoanalysis. How does 17 address testimonial discourse without losing the critical standards traditionally accorded to academic discourse?**

B.M.F.: Testimonial speech has taken an important place among us. We do not think of it as providing some privileged access to truth but, on the contrary, as being capable of displacing various types of speech, including classically-conceived fiction. A number of student-projects have taken the form of testimonies and have successfully put in relation personal and public concerns of various sorts. Etelvina Bernal's *The Flood is Elsewhere*, part of which is included in the present volume, is a case in point. Its impact has been felt in her native Tabasco, and is still growing. Traditionally, testimonial speech tends to be excluded from the University because it is perceived as a threat to scientific and other formal approaches. Furthermore, our proposal has involved consistently bringing together, around diverse critical, theoretical, analytic and also creative vocabularies, those formed in the most varied disciplines (for example, Literature, Philosophy, Art, Psychoanalysis, Architecture, and, under certain conditions, Economics, Law, Medicine, and so on). In this way, disciplinary objects of interest become instances through which such vocabularies find articulation, elaboration – and interpellation. The nature of our efforts is post-academic insofar as it does not attempt to restore knowledge to its mythical lost unity. On the contrary, we confront the illusions of such hypothetical loss in the name of its primal necessity and originating vocation. As I said previously, we are interested in that which is the source of the most intimate concerns; our orientation is toward the event.

**G.M.C.: Is the post-University a sort of event-machine?**

B.M.F.: Here there is an interesting debate with certain philosophical positions that tend to foreground the impossibility of bringing about an event as if in a laboratory situation. But then again, deconstructive reading either produces an event or it is nothing. In this sense there is a central affinity, very important to me, between the clinical practice of the psychoanalyst and the critical practice of the deconstructor. If psychoanalysis does not produce an event, then it is nothing. That is to say, the event is the only thing that can confront repetition, the compulsion toward repetition associated with the drives as described by Freud. The post-University supposes an inclination towards the event insofar as it counters repetition, the very stuff of metaphysics. 17 is about creating a space that is hospitable to the event but also propitious for it. As we know, inherent to the event is a disruptive force with respect to schools, trends, currents, canons and so forth. We *tympanize* the ways of the University in order to promote an atmosphere for writing that remains receptive to the unfolding of events. While events cannot deliberately be brought about, the deconstructive reader is not aimless, nor is the free-floating attention of the psychoanalyst desireless (at the close of the *Écrits*, Lacan refers to the desire of the analyst as the desire for 'absolute difference'). Such a perspective brought us close to the matter of so-called 'disability' long ago. Whereas traditional approaches in its field tend towards normalization, we question the fictions of the normal on the basis of its exceptions. The blind photographer, a figure whose topology greatly enriched the foundation of the Institute (in 2010 we distinguished Evgen Bavčar, the pioneer of blind photography, with our first Honorary Doctoral Degree), demonstrates precisely such an operation: structurally residual to the scopic regime of the sighted, previously repressed blindness returns to shake and shift the field of visibility as a whole. The figure of the blind photographer furnishes a concrete instance of the Discourse of Deconstruction at play, and of its

capacity to open a novel perspective with respect to the general field of critical disability studies.

**G.M.C.: Let's talk about 'editorial' events. One of the issues raised by *Culture Machine's* second volume is the relationship between the publishing industry and knowledge production in the University. Can you describe the editorial dimension of 17?**

B.M.F.: This is a central question for us because, being faithful to the description of the Institute as a space for writing in a Derridian sense, *editorial* activity is everything. The Institute is managed critically as an editorial project, even when no publication is released. In fact that is what makes our approach to online work and education rather singular. The fruits of this approach have already emerged in the form of textual productions that circulate usefully, regardless of whether not they adopt a classical editorial form. Our publications represent our only institutional embodiment, given that, for the time being, our infrastructure is either digital or transitory. Our own flagship editorial endeavor is the collection of books entitled *Diecisiete*. It provides a tangible skin to our online activities, while its texts and other multimedia materials not included in the paper edition are freely-available in digital form. The volumes comprising *Diecisiete* are archival: they can behave as integral books or as book-shelves incorporating shorter volumes alongside certain journal-sections. This editorial invention captures the mobility of the Institute and allows it to circumvent some of the obstacles of the market in a context where textual circulation is tightly restricted due to poverty and lack of access to a good education, and where publishing has been an elite business much more profoundly than in the English-speaking countries. In order to be economically viable, a book needs a readership well beyond specialist academics and must move across at least three national markets: for instance Spain, Colombia and Argentina, or Spain, Argentina and Mexico. The hegemony of the editorial corporations is clear. Yet smaller publishing-houses are able to affirm themselves in significant niches, not least those left behind by universities or large publishing houses that increasingly shift their investments to profit-driven editorial production. At times we are able to publish on the basis of governmental grants. Otherwise we publish on the basis of income obtained from a section of our publication that receives paid insertions which are not allowed elsewhere in the volume. Inspired by Kurt Schwitters' *Merz Art*, this section allows for the publication of commercial materials that are given out to be read on a par with academic or cultural content. We have encouraged insertions of a number of pages (10, 20, 30, even more), with the result that we have started to carry exhibition catalogues. What do we offer? Institutions are interested in our readership and, as far as costs go, such inserted catalogues are much more accessible than those produced and distributed singly. The solution described allows us to publish diverse materials without depending on commercial success, or fixed subsidies. Moreover, the paid-insertions might eventually turn into a show-case of contemporary Mexican culture.

**G.M.C.: You have just described something like an event. The solution to the financing problem allows you to interrupt a repetitive lamentation, one that is typically heard in the University regarding the capitalist domination of the editorial world. Is it also an example of what you call 'critical entrepreneurship'?**

B.M.F.: One could be easily discouraged in the face of editorial corporations, including university presses, and justifiably feel a bit crushed by their enormity. Yet just as clear as that state of affairs is the existence of social actors who do not simply accept being crushed by such corporate steamrollers. Instead, they undertake alternatives, the success of which is not infrequent despite the fact that it requires intense work and remarkable persistence. Without being overly optimistic, the range of alternatives is likely to expand in proportion to the intellectual impoverishment of the institutional mainstream. In our own case, we inscribe our editorial strategies within the horizon of critical management, which is associated in turn with the field of Critical Management Studies. The latter, by the way, speaks of a process shared by Mexico and the UK, and this also has something to do with your question. When we forget that there is always an alternative to the corporate steamroller, we become blind to the surprising effects of something like the shut-down of all those socially-oriented academic departments in the dark years of the Thatcher regime. Many of those people were hired by business schools. One could predict that they would be ideologically co-opted, yet thirty years later what we see is a very important critical management movement. That is, people continued doing their work, and far from being simply co-opted (though this might have happened in some cases), they produced critical reflections on business, organization, management, accounting, human resources and so forth. Today we have publications of an amazing quality in that domain, and they have begun to fertilize relevant academic areas in the United States and elsewhere. Similarly, for us, to manage 17 on the basis of traditional business presuppositions makes no conceptual or practical sense. And our experiences suggest that our political Left must urgently grow out of its State-centered *monolingualism* in order to engage critically with wider questions of management and entrepreneurship in all sorts of forms and settings. Once again, this is not to say that it will definitively succeed, but at least it will create an alternative at a time when the idea of business itself is undergoing a profound crisis, not just an economic but a moral crisis, as it

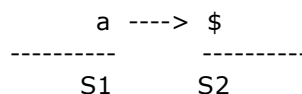


clearly has since 2008. This is a crisis of morale and public legitimacy that adds to other crises such as the environmental and social crisis. What we see is a breeding ground for Critical Management Studies, which will have a greater projection in spite of conservative retrenchment. In Mexico and the Spanish-speaking world such currents have much to contribute to our way of thinking and to what we do in the fields we are keen to promote. The critical entrepreneurship I am interested in goes beyond interrogating discourses of business administration and of productive efficiency, because what is at stake is more than doing academic work around the idea of business. At stake is the education of business managers and organizers who are effectively critical. That is, they must take care of everything that our Leftists forget in their exclusive preoccupation with the State, as if nothing else existed.

**G.M.C.: Yet it is still necessary to fight for the state, particularly for the inhabitants of a 'failed state', as Mexico has been described in recent years. How should we understand such a struggle from the standpoint of the post-University?**

B.M.F.: The standpoint of the post-University emerges from a broken horizon. If we stick to the University paradigm, we simply do not measure up to what is at stake, and therefore discussions become somewhat banal. A second point refers to the darker side of that banality, which in Mexico is illustrated by the fact that the national research system economically stimulates the production of low-quality publications (since according to the system's criterion of 'efficiency', publications have to be produced like hot-cakes). The only ones that can actually meet this criteria are the technologists, and they are the only ones who can promise to fulfil the dream of relevance for the University, yet they do it in the most painful way: as agents of R&D, probably at low-cost, for big corporations that appropriate their work for their productive processes. When this dream of collaboration between the University and the productive sector is achieved, we no longer have a University. Without knowing exactly why or how, some of us have chosen to leave that institution (we no longer know what it is), in order to create spaces where the critical role previously entrusted to the university can be updated and pursued. Lastly, the topic of globalisation is also at stake here, even though I think globalisation is still largely a myth. For instance, we work with tutors and students who live in different parts of the world, yet this is extraordinarily complex from an administrative perspective. I think that it is the criminals who are leading the process of globalisation, because they are the ones who are effectively profiting from the fluidity of operations. It is urgent to think about what we can learn from them in relation to the current status of the nation-state, globalisation and so forth, and this is exactly the discussion we have proposed around the notion of trafficking ([published as \*Tráficos\*, the second volume of \*Diecisiete\*](#)). Let me use one more diagram to explain our approach to trafficking as a form of sociality:

Discourse of Trafficking (my suggestion):



The starting-point of this Discourse is the same as that of the Discourse of the Analyst (a ---> \$). Criminality confronts the subject with *plus-de-jouir*, yet in perverse contrast with psychoanalysis, in doing so it does not give forth a new signifier (S1) capable of 'representing' the subject. Instead, in its midst Law (S1) remains, in the place of Truth, inaccessible, and it yields an interminable series of anchorless secondary signifiers (S2), which we can associate with all sorts of spurious symbolic forms, money included. Thus, the Discourse of Deconstruction is also a confrontation with such secondary signifiers (a ---> S2), either in the name of desire (\$ in the place of Truth), or in the name of Justice (S1 in the place of Truth). All of which can only underline the significance of deconstructive institution-building — the post-University and beyond — in an age of generalized trafficking.