



## THE GOVERNMENTALITY OF THE FLEXIBLE ENTERPRISE IN LATIN AMERICA

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### **Abstract**

We discuss the contributions of the analytics of governmentality developed by Foucault to critically examine transformations in work and in labor subjectivities in Latin America, in the context of flexible capitalism. The way the flexible enterprise and neomanagerial discourse can be conceptualized as a government apparatus, in which particular games of truth, power relations and ways of subjectivation are intertwined, is discussed. We present 4 traits of government rationality of the flexible enterprise - Human capital , incorporating social life and subjectivity in the production process, postdisciplinary control technologies, new ideal of flexible worker- highlighting ways of labor subjectivation that promote and their affinities with the logic of neoliberal governmentality.

**Keywords:** subjectivity; work; governmentality; flexible enterprise; Foucault

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### **Introduction**

One of the main challenges for the social psychology of work in Latin America is the development of conceptual frameworks that allow analyzing and critically interrogating the current processes of production of labor subjectivities. This, in the context of the insertion of the countries of the region into the new regime of capitalist accumulation (flexible, global, informational, networked) and its matrix of neoliberal sociopolitical regulation or advanced liberalism (Amin,



1994; Castells, 2001, 2005; De la Garza, 2000; Harvey, 1998). As has been widely documented, this global dynamic of capitalist restructuring and reconfiguration of modern societies (transition from organized or solid modernity to late or liquid modernity) has led to strong processes of productive restructuring in the last three decades, business modernization and labor flexibility in Latin America, which acquire differentiated characteristics according to the particular national contexts, economic sectors, industries, types of company or organization (public/private, large/small, formal/informal, etc.), among others ( De la Garza, 2000; Neffa, 2003; Stecher & Godoy, 2014). These processes have strongly transformed the work scenarios and the work conditions and experiences of vast sectors of the population, giving rise to new and unique configurations of work subjectivity. That is, to new modalities of experiencing and interpreting work experience and of constituting oneself as a labor subject of a certain type with particular ways of thinking, feeling and acting with respect to oneself, others and the world as a worker (Battistini, 2004; Soto, 2008; Stecher, 2013; Tittoni & Nardi, 2011).

Seeking to contribute to the debate and enrichment of analytical perspectives that allow us to critically interrogate these processes of reconfiguration of labor subjectivities in Latin America, this article presents and discusses the framework of the Analytics of Governmentality formulated by Michel Foucault (2006, 2007) in his courses at the end of the 70s at the Collège de France, and continued later by a group of Anglophone authors who gave shape to the so-called Governmentality Studies (Castro-Gómez, 2010; Dean, 2008; Miller & Rose, 2008; Rose , 1997; Rose & Miller, 1992; Vázquez, 2005). Within this vast field, the argument of this article will focus on and be limited to giving an



account of how the concepts of governmentality, government rationalities and neoliberal governmentality,

With this objective, the article has been organized as follows. First, some basic elements of the analytics and history of governmentality are presented very briefly. Secondly, the three large families of governmentality possible to distinguish in the historical itinerary of modern societies are discussed, highlighting the characteristics of the current neoliberal governmentality and the self-entrepreneurial subject. Thirdly, the way in which the flexible company and its neomanagerial rationality can be conceptualized as a government device that promotes a particular type of labor subjectivity is examined. Fourthly, four axes are analyzed that define the specificity of the governance rationality of the flexible company, making visible the articulations of each of them with the production processes of labor subjectivities. Finally, in the final reflections, certain considerations are highlighted regarding the use of the analysis of governmentality in psycho-social-labor research in Latin America, and the critical and transformative potential of said perspective is highlighted.

### **History and analysis of governmentality**

The history of governmentality developed by Foucault (2006, 2007) in the 1978 seminars "Security, Territory and Population" and "The Birth of Biopolitics" in 1979, seeks to account for the particular regime of power that emerges and serves as a basis to the formation of the modern-liberal State starting in the 18th century. It is a regime of power (the governing State or the governmentalization of the State) that acquires primacy over other legal or disciplinary power mechanisms, and is characterized by having as its main focus the management of the life of the population ( biopolitics), through the knowledge provided by



liberal economic knowledge, and that operates based on security devices or regulatory mechanisms (Foucault, 2006; Ramos, 2012).

The distinctiveness of security devices, or of liberalism understood as a technology of government that marks the emergence and deployment, to this day, of modernity<sup>1</sup>, is that these are not based on the vertical authorization/prohibition of certain activities (legal, sovereignty mechanisms) nor on the regulation of behaviors based on predefined and strongly prescriptive codes to which individuals must conform (disciplinary mechanisms). They are based, rather, on the regulation, anticipation and management of events and phenomena, based on the knowledge of scientific disciplines and assuming the principle of not intervening in their regularities and internal laws, as well as in the creation of certain frameworks that encourage the same agents to freely choose certain types of behavior (Castro-Gómez, 2010; Ramos, 2012). The central displacement, which it is necessary to notice in this analysis of Foucault's governmentality, is the transition, both conceptual and historical, from a model that understands power relations in terms of domination to one based on the notion of government, where the latter is understood as the conduct of the behavior of people with the capacity for free choice and decision, towards certain goals and results, including both leading and guiding others, and leading oneself in a field of possible actions (Foucault, 2001). In this way, government is not opposed to freedom, but rather produces and presupposes free agents whose behavior is sought to be directed towards certain ends, intervening in the conditions of the environment where they make choices and modulating the ways in which they govern themselves (Binkley, 2014 ) where the latter is understood as the conduct of the behavior of people with the capacity for free choice and decision, towards certain ends and results, including



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And if the technologies of government already presuppose from the outset the capacity for action of individuals, that is, their freedom, it is then clear that the goal of these technologies is self-regulation: to ensure that the governed make their own desires, decisions, hopes, needs and lifestyles with government objectives set in advance. That is why governing does not mean forcing others to behave in a certain way (and against their will), but ensuring that this behavior is seen by the governed themselves as good, honorable, dignified and, above all, as their own, as coming from their freedom (...) [there is a] new conception of power as government over actions. There is no direct and immediate intervention on others (violently repressing their actions), but rather on the possible field of their actions. The aim is not, then, to annul the freedom



of the subjects, but rather to guide it, and this through specific technologies. (pp. 43-44)

Following Miller and Rose (2008), Castro-Gómez (2010) and Rose (2003), it is possible to point out that carrying out an analysis of governmentality in a certain historical moment, context and particular social sphere of modern societies, involves questioning by the specific rationality of government (special objectives for the orientation of behavior, means and strategies), which articulates and assembles in a certain direction a set of discursive and non-discursive practices in a specific domain or social world (industry, school , consumption, family, etc.). In more precise terms, guiding an empirical investigation from this perspective of analysis requires addressing three axes (genealogical, archaeological and the relationship of the subject with himself) and asking, for each of them, a set of questions.

The first axis refers to the need to carry out (i) a genealogical analysis of the way in which a specific situation was configured as problematic for certain agencies and authorities, giving way to interventions and techniques (technological dimension) to guide the behavior of groups and individuals towards specific objectives considered desirable; local objectives that eventually resonate with certain broader political, moral, and social purposes of a certain political rationality. Thus, for example, it is possible to ask ourselves, in what way and as a result of what processes certain logics and practices of bureaucratic-Fordist business management begin to appear as problematic for defined groups or national and business authorities,

The second axis refers to the need to carry out (ii) an archaeological analysis of the discourses or games of truth that configure, make intelligible and epistemically legitimize the problem, the government objectives, the



technologies and the authorities. Here, for example, it would be possible to ask what discourses or truth games have discursively configured and provided intelligibility and epistemic legitimacy to the representation of the anachronistic, ineffective and negative character of bureaucratic and Fordist forms of administration, as well as the virtuous character. , modern and unavoidable of the new flexible logics of new management, providing cognitive verisimilitude to the objectives of conducting behavior that define the new rationality of government of the business world and organizations?

The third axis alludes to the importance of carrying out (iii) an analysis of ethics or the way the subject relates to himself (subjectification) that is encouraged in a specific social scenario by the particular rationality of government and its truth games. (holding); that is, an analysis of the processes of subjectification or production of subjectivities of a certain type within the framework of certain historical relations of knowledge/power<sup>3</sup>. What new models or ideals of businessman, manager and worker and what specific modalities of one's relationship with oneself are promoted as part of the efforts to (re)conduct the behavior of individuals within companies and organizations, seeking to promote the self-regulation and the alignment of the aspirations and free decisions of each professional and manager with the objectives defined and considered desirable by the authorities of the economic and business sphere? What are the connections that can be identified between the type of subjectivity or relationship with the same thing that favors among professional and managerial cadres the rationality of neo-managerial government and certain broader political, social, and moral objectives typical of neoliberal political rationality located on a larger scale? (Rose, 2003).





It is from this analytical tripod (authority/power, truth games, subjectivation) that the analysis of governmentality incorporates the three great moments or perspectives of analysis of Foucault's work (archaeology, genealogy, ethics), offering a fruitful conceptual framework for analyze the processes of production of subjectivities (subjectification) in different fields of social relations within modern societies (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 2001; Miller & Rose, 2008; Zangaro, 2011). It is an anti-essentialist, anti-dualist and critical perspective that makes visible the way in which the forms of subjectivity present in a particular social field and socio-historical scenario are linked to the prevailing rationalities of government. Rationalities whose operation of conduct conduct, Through various techniques and within the framework of certain truth games, it is based precisely on trying to model in a certain way the desires, aspirations, interests and beliefs of individuals so that they choose, as free agents, to conduct themselves. themselves in a particular way in a possible field of actions (Dean, 2008). As Paul du Gay (1996) has written:

(...) the government operates through the subjects. (...). Forms of power function because they construct and maintain the forms of subjectivity most appropriate to a given type of government rationality. Subjectivities are constituted and are linked to particular forms of power through various techniques, knowledge and practices immanent to that form of power. Thus power works in and through subjectivity. Different rationalities of government (...) are linked to conceptions and attributes of those who are governed (...) involve the construction of particular ways of being for individuals. (p. 55)

### **Historical forms of governmentality and neoliberal rationality**





Although there is historical continuity in governmentality, as a rationality of government that articulates the social practices and configurations that constitute the modern liberal State from the 18th century to the present day<sup>4</sup>, it is possible to distinguish within it three large families or periods<sup>4</sup> (Dean , 2008; Miller & Rose, 2008): classical liberalism, social liberalism and advanced liberalism or neoliberalism. These three families of governmentality share the primacy of security mechanisms<sup>5</sup> for the government of the population, groups and institutions, as well as the budget and production of the capacity for self-government and freedom of individuals, which is managed through intervention in the conditions or the environment in which agents calculate and they choose their courses of action for themselves (Binkley, 2014; Ramos, 2012). Each of these three families will be briefly described, with greater focus and attention on neoliberal governmentality, as contemporary political rationality in which it is possible to situate the processes of productive restructuring, business modernization, flexibility and production of new labor subjectivities that are the center of interest of this article.

a) Classical liberalism emerged in the 18th century and is based on an economic government that recognizes a set of spheres (market, civil society, private life) as external to the State, with its own autonomy and legality, which must be respected and not directly intervened. It is an economic government based on the promotion of natural market mechanisms described by economic science, which requires the production of freedom (of work, of trade, of property, of participation) of the agents (homo economicus). and non-intervention or limitation of State action so as not to disturb internal laws and favor the self-regulation of economic (market), biological (population) and cultural (civil society) processes (Miller & Rose, 2008; Vázquez, 2005) .



b) Social liberalism that began to take shape in the last stretch of the 19th century, was legitimized as a predominant form of government from 1930 in the context of the serious economic crisis of capitalism, and reached its maximum consolidation within the framework of the so-called State. social welfare in the postwar period between 1945 and 1975. Social liberalism emerged as a reaction to the insufficiency of the laissez faire logic of classical liberalism, to respond to a set of dynamics (overcrowding, pauperism, unhealthiness, migration , urban growth, threat of the communist revolution) produced by modernization itself and that threatened the viability of liberal capitalist modernity. Thus, it arises, in the context of what was called the emergence of the social issue, the need to expand and strengthen the modalities of state action and intervention in economic and social life (Vázquez, 2005). This new social government involved the deployment of extensive protection and security mechanisms, framed in the expert knowledge of scientific disciplines, aimed at covering a set of basic needs (health, education, old age, housing) of individuals to encourage integration and social cohesion. These were mechanisms based on logics of solidarity and mutual interdependence, which partially moved away from the figure of homo economicus responsible for risk management himself, and which established the figure of the "social citizen" as a subject of needs,

c) Neoliberalism or advanced liberalism emerges as a response to social government and State interference, characterized by what Foucault (2007) called a "Phobia of the State." First, as a theoretical formulation in the German ordoliberalism of the 1930s and in the neoliberalism of the Chicago economic school of the 1950s and 1960s, and later as a predominant form of governmentality in social life after 1980; Neoliberalism (or advanced liberalism) must be understood as a new modality of liberal political



rationality. What is distinctive about this is its absolute rejection of state interference and planning and the dependence of individuals on social protection mechanisms, as well as the reorganization of all social relations under the company form (Foucault, 2007; McNay, 2009). This particular form of government rationality—which emerges as a response to a set of problematizations and limits that Fordist-Keynesian capitalism faced in the 1970s, a product of processes such as economic globalization, revolution technology, higher levels of education and individualization, the crisis of the accumulation process, etc. — is not a mere reissue of classical liberalism. It is no longer just a State that recognizes and respects the laws of the market, and encourages the exchange of goods between individual agents understood as homo economicus (Foucault, 2007). It is a State that actively reorganizes and sustains the functioning of the entirety of social life under the principles and dynamics of competition, risk and entrepreneurship; including this a process of entrepreneurialization of life, experiences and subjectivity itself (Foucault, 2007; McNay, 2009; Rose 2003).

The notion of "self-entrepreneur"—in a way equivalent to what was already stated about "homo economicus" and the "social citizen"—seeks to account for the particular modalities of subjection and subjectivation that characterize the processes of subjectification under the coordinates historical facts of neoliberal governmentality. This is a profile of a strongly individualized subject, entrepreneurial, responsible for his or her destiny, who lives exposed to risk and who must be able to constantly reinvent himself. A subject who must self-regulate and manage himself in the different markets in which he participates, who strongly values individual satisfaction through the consumption of goods, services and experiences, who refuses and distrusts hierarchies and institutional



authorities, always affirming the value of freedom, subjective well-being, personal happiness and personal self-realization, guided by the strategic search to develop oneself, empower oneself, overcome or overcome one's own limits, expand one's skills and qualities—understood as human capital—in order to differentiate oneself, find opportunity niches and stand out in a social space marked by continuous competition with different actors (Binkley, 2014; Rose, 2003). This "self-entrepreneur" who affirms his freedom of choice, who constantly proposes new projects of improvement and who is guided by the desire to "conduct his own existence as a project for maximizing the quality of life" (Rose, 2003 , p. 244), It implies a break with the regulatory logic of social liberalism where the strong normative prescription and disciplinary mechanisms—assembled in security logic—played an important role in broad domains and social institutions: the family, the school, the factory. This is, thus, the moment of maximum expansion of the liberal government technologies that characterize modernity, and that are based on the production and affirmation of the "freedom" of choice of each individual thought, under neoliberal logic, as an entrepreneur. of himself (Burchel, 1996).

### **The flexible company and the new management as a government device**

One of the contributions of the history and analysis of governmentality to the field of critical studies of work and organizations in Latin America is the possibility it offers us of analyzing large, highly productive companies, belonging to the modern and formal stratum of the economy and connected to global economic circuits, as new government devices organized around the principles of organization and flexible management of the new management (Weiskopf & Munro, 2011; Zangaro, 2011). Although large companies do not represent, in any case, all of the heterogeneous and unequal worlds of work in



the countries of the region - where 48% of workers are inserted in the informal sector (Tokman, 2011) -, play a central role in terms of productivity, generation of salaried employment and model of what is considered and promoted as modern management practices. In this way, they constitute a privileged area to analyze the processes of productive restructuring, business modernization and labor flexibility, which have occurred in recent decades in the different countries of the region, as well as the way in which these processes have led to important transformations in subjectivities. labor.

When we speak of a flexible company we refer to an ideal type that accounts for a particular articulation of techno-socio-productive elements, through which a new and particular modality of capitalist rationalization of work is deployed. It is the ideal prototype of a productive unit in the context of the new regime of accumulation (flexible, networked, informational) and socio-political regulation (neoliberal) that characterizes contemporary capitalism. In very schematic and enumerative terms, the flexible or post-Fordist company, which is defined largely in opposition to the large Taylorist-Fordist and bureaucratic industry of industrial capitalism, is characterized, according to authors such as Castells (2001), Neffa (2003), Ramos (2009), Sennett (2006) and Vallas (1999) by:

a) new forms of organization of production and business management: network company, productive decentralization, outsourcing and creation of business networks, principles of commercialization and internal competition between units/workers of the same company, just-in-time production systems oriented from the customer demand, total quality demands, ideal of a lean or lean company that reduces downtime and produces maximum value with minimum resources, continuous innovation, versatile production, constant evaluation and



remuneration systems that are strongly individualized and linked to the fulfillment of goals and objectives.

b) new post-Taylorist, Toyotist or flexible modalities of work organization: versatility and polyfunctionality, semi-autonomous work teams, quality circles, job rotation and expansion, mobilization of cognitive and emotional skills, regulatory control based on self-regulation, intensification of work, individual responsibility and demand for high involvement and permanent availability of the worker, centrality of the client as an agent of control of the work process, permanent demands for training and continuous learning, strong use of forms of temporal and salary flexibility.

c) Processes of employment flexibility and change in labor relations: processes of individualization, (re)commodification and decollectivization of labor relations, weakening of the union organization as a sociopolitical actor, increasing use of flexible, atypical, uncertain and usually precarious forms of employment (fixed-term contracts, for work/task or projects, temporary, internship, supplied workers, subcontracted, part-time work, for fees, etc.).

d) Technological innovation processes: use of new computer information and communication technologies, support of new forms of management and network organization that allow the acceleration, automation, adaptation and interconnection of productive processes of goods and services on a local and global scale, and that play a central role in blurring the classic boundaries between work and non-work times and spaces.

e) New discourses, knowledge and work culture: expansion from management teams of a neo-managerial and post-Fordist work culture that institutes new values and meanings of work experience linked to change, flexibility, projects, innovation, management risk and uncertainty; as well as new ideals of the labor



subject linked to the figure of the flexible and entrepreneurial worker (Sennett, 2006).

From the perspective of the analysis of governmentality, and focusing not on the political rationalities of society, but on a limited and local scope of the social world such as work, it is possible to interrogate the flexible company as a particular device organized around a specific rationality of government. That is, as a specific heterogeneous framework of discursive and non-discursive practices, articulated by a specific practical rationality or government program that defines certain objectives, means and business strategies, and configures a space for conducting the conduct of labor subjects through of the structuring of a possible field of actions (Rabinow & Rose, 2001). As a device, the flexible company reflects a specific historical strategy oriented,

Like any government device, the flexible company is not just a bundle of power relations crystallized in the effort of certain authorities (managers, entrepreneurs, large owners of capital, government authorities) to deploy particular techniques and procedures to direct the behavior of the workforce, but also simultaneously supposes certain neo-managerial games or discourses of truth (regarding work, the company, production, the economy, unions, etc.) that make the new practices of government and practices credible and acceptable. flexible management. Likewise, it is characterized by favoring specific modalities of subjectivation and encouraging certain modes of relationship with themselves in workers, within the framework of the truth games of neo-managerial discourses (Zangaro, 2011). It is, precisely,

The perspective of governmentality allows, then, to interrogate the current work spaces of the large and modernized companies in the region that have adopted the flexible principles of the new management, as a field of singular experience





where certain power relations, certain games of truth converge. and particular modes of subjectivity are promoted, three areas that, as already noted, constitute the central axes of analysis from the perspective of governmentality, which must be studied considering both their strong interweaving with each other and their relative specificity and irreducibility. (Castro-Gómez, 2011; Rabinow & Rose, 2003).

### **The flexible company and neomanagerial rationality**

We highlight four aspects of the government rationality of the flexible company that are especially relevant to understand the forms of labor subjectivity that it promotes, to make visible its deep resonances with neoliberal governmentality and the figure of the self-entrepreneur, as well as to illustrate the contributions of the analysis of governmentality to the understanding of contemporary transformations of work. In each of these aspects, the three axes indicated (power/authority, truth, subjectivation) are brought into play—with different emphasis—<sup>6</sup>.

### **From the employee to the self-entrepreneur who invests his human capital**

Under the new forms of flexible management, the worker is no longer represented or addressed primarily as an individual who rents his labor power in exchange for a salary in order to survive and who has antagonistic interests (whether he knows it or not) with capital or company. The worker is seen (and encouraged to see himself) as a self-entrepreneur who has a particular initial capital—his human capital—which he seeks to maximize and invest in different job insertions (Fleming, 2013; Weiskopf & Munro, 2011). . It is an active economic subject, who permanently calculates costs and benefits, and understands that by working he is making an investment of his own capital (inherited and acquired) of knowledge, abilities and skills in pursuit of



generating (like any capitalist businessman) some type of profit or income (Castro-Gómez, 2011). More than in terms of an employment relationship—strongly regulated, collectivized, asymmetrical and potentially conflictive—between company and workers, the flexible company the workforce (especially professional cadres) in terms of a commercial alliance, of uncertain duration and beneficial for both parties, between two capitalist actors (the company that owns the means of production and the worker who owns their human capital) who are oriented toward maximizing their own initial capital. As Read (2009) points out, the processes of employment flexibility must be understood, with their increase in atypical forms of hiring (temporary, part-time, for the provision of commercial services, etc.), not only as an effective economic strategy of large companies to reduce costs, but as an important vector of the production processes of labor subjectivities. Said organizational logic:

(...) encourages workers to see themselves not as "workers" in a political sense, who have something to gain through solidarity and collective organization, but as "companies of oneself." They become individuals for whom every action, from taking courses in new computer software applications to whitening their teeth, can be considered an investment in human capital. (p. 30)

Other principles of flexible management at the level of the work process, such as variable income systems based on individual productivity or the implementation of principles of competition for bonuses between workers in the same unit, also produce a work environment that drives employee behavior. workers and encourages them to govern themselves, in the logic of the "self-entrepreneur": subjects responsible for their successes and failures, for whom the company itself is a market of high competition and uncertainty that offers possibilities to invest human capital initial and obtain an income that maximizes



it. As Foucault (2007) wrote in his analysis of human capital theories, neoliberal governmentality,

### **The integration of life and social subjectivity to the productive process**

As Peter Fleming (2013) has analyzed based on the concept of "biocracy", a feature of the flexible company is the instrumentalization and use - as a source to capitalize - of (non-work) attributes of life and social subjectivity, which they were considered irrelevant or even harmful by the Taylorist-Fordist bureaucratic industry (Perilleux, 2008).

Firstly, new forms of management encourage workers to display a set of personal attributes at work (sympathy, personal seal, warmth, empathy) and to configure informal collaborative networks, which appear as elements that increase productivity and quality of performances. Rather than vertically prohibiting these more unique, spontaneous and informal dimensions, the new flexible company encourages and promotes them, as mechanisms that play a crucial role in the collective generation of innovation and useful knowledge, in the articulation of teams and work projects, as well as in the motivation and strong involvement of the subjects with their work, all of which is a key factor in business competitiveness in the new productive paradigm (Coriat, 2009). Increasingly,

Secondly, business logics are observed that blur the limits between times, spaces and logics of work and non-work, dismantling, symbolically and practically, the strong division of life/work that operated as a central principle of the Fordist industry and liberalism. social. It is not just that, as a result of the intensification of work and new information technologies, work invades and occupies other times of social life (personal, family, leisure, politics, etc.). Nor, only, that as a result of the flexibility and precariousness of employment - with



its growing number of workers with variable shifts, pluriactivity, temporary employment and lack of access to rights—weakens the figure of a standardized and stable working day that clearly and permanently separates working times from non-working times (nights, weekends, vacations, periods of disease). Along with the above, biocracy, as a flexible company governance diagram, considers many non-work activities as contributing to the sphere of production and value generation (Fleming, 2013). Activities such as traveling the world, developing volunteer activities, playing sports, learning about the latest virtual games or TV series, participating in meetings with alumni networks, have the potential to provide knowledge, energy, networks, This element of neomanagerial rationality favors processes of labor subjectification that produce a subject who is represented and experienced no longer as an employee who clearly distinguishes the time and space of work, from the time and space of non-work, as well as his role and mainly physical and strongly prescribed work activity, of their autonomous personal life, of their informal networks and of their cognitive and emotional uniqueness. On the contrary, he is an entrepreneur of himself, dedicated in every space and minute to the investment and maximization of his human capital, both due to the desire to achieve greater capitalization and success from the mobilization of all aspects of its existence, as well as the fear that in a competitive, uncertain, changing work environment and with weak social protections,

### **From disciplinary control technologies to security technologies**

The factory space under industrial capitalism, although inserted in the general societal framework of a governmentality of social liberalism based on security mechanisms, operated strongly at the local level based on disciplinary technologies of control and management of the workforce. The flexible



company, on the contrary, introduces new post-disciplinary management and control logics based on security technologies into the very heart of the production process (Weiskopf & Munro, 2011).

The new management moves away from the idea, typical of the factory discipline of Fordist modernity, that the worker is, fundamentally, an object, a mere body, that must be monitored, controlled and corrected to make him docile and usefully coupled. to a previously defined, planned and established productive machinery (Zangaro, 2011). It is no longer a question, in the transition from the figure of the Fordist factory to the flexible company, of operating with a "centripetal" disciplinary logic that divides the work space, locates bodies, regulates and standardizes times and rhythms, prescribes each one of the actions to be carried out, establishes a standard, externally examines and monitors compliance with it and sanctions workers who deviate from it. On the contrary, within the framework of the flexible company and its security logic, It is about, as Weiskopf and Munro (2011) point out, installing a "centrifugal" logic that allows circulation, movement, and initiative of workers. It no longer intervenes directly and prescriptively on their actions, but on their environment, on the field and the possible framework of the workers' actions, seeking that they autonomously and self-regulately choose certain courses of action that favor obtaining certain business objectives. More than a disciplinary normalization based on adaptation to a standard, homogeneous, unique and previously defined norm (normation), The forms of control of the flexible company operate based on a normalization established from the management of certain parameters based on statistical analysis that establish broader and mobile contours within which workers are expected to act (Foucault, 2006). In this way, the rationality of governance of the flexible



company does not mean going against the freedom of workers understood as entrepreneurs of themselves, but rather influencing and configuring the framework where they make their decisions and undertake projects and actions, as well as managing the inevitable dangers and risks that this greater autonomy of workers continually causes in the business device.

The above does not imply, of course, that empirically in flexible companies there do not continue to exist, especially in the case of low-skilled workers, strong disciplinary control mechanisms; but it does account, as Yáñez (2004) points out, that the governing rationality of the device points to a growing use of "internalized forms of self-control, self-organization and self-rationalization by the workers themselves" (p. 70), which are less expensive and more efficient in light of the demands for versatility, innovation, continuous change and strategic adaptability to competitive and uncertain markets typical of flexible capitalism. Thus, forms of work subjectivity characterized by high initiative,

### **Emergence of a new telos or ideal of the flexible worker**

As Foucault (1996) points out, a central element of subjectivation is the telos or ideal of the subject that accounts for the type of person one aspires to become based on a certain work on oneself. In the case of labor subjectification processes in the flexible company, the new management discourse has played a central role in instituting new representations of what a subject should aspire to be as a worker (Zangaro, 2011).

Faced with the Fordist ideal of the disciplined worker, anchored in a strong identity of occupation and class, inserted in a dense mesh of social protections, projected in a relatively stable work trajectory and inserted in enduring and homogeneous groups of workers (large industry or the public apparatus) that contribute to national development, a new ideal of an entrepreneurial, flexible



and individualized worker would have emerged. This is a self-demanding, versatile, competitive, self-regulated, versatile, calculating worker, always available, efficient, innovative, autonomous within the established margins, physically, cognitively and emotionally involved with the organization, loyal and non-conflictive, suitable for work. team up,

This model and ideal of a worker would increasingly operate as a social mandate and as an articulating principle of labor subjectivities in the new flexible company, instituting a particular representation of what people should be as workers, of the goals and desires that we must pursue. of the modalities of relationship with oneself and with others that we must cultivate, of the principles of right and wrong that we must adhere to if we want to progress, be valued and recognized in the company, the labor market and in social life. in general (Stecher, 2009). At the same time, like any ideal of the subject, this model of the worker supposes a reduction in meaning that creates and requires a domain of alterity, other figures of the worker (the bureaucrat, the class-conscious worker,

### **Final considerations**

From the description of these four axes, we have sought to account for some key elements of the rationality of governance of the flexible company, highlighting the way in which it promotes and encourages particular modalities of labor subjectivity in the crucible of a network of techniques, knowledge and practices. These forms of subjectivity have strong resonances with what was previously described regarding neoliberal governmentality and the figure of the self-entrepreneur, and must be understood not only as a subsequent effect of the operation of the flexible company, but as a condition of possibility and





sustainability of that same rationality of government that produces it. As has been highlighted, the flexible company must be understood,

To conclude, two considerations are presented regarding the use of governmentality analytics in empirical research on work and subjectivity in Latin America. Firstly, it is important not to take the description of the flexible company (an ideal type), its rationality of government and the modes of labor subjectivity that it promotes as an empirical description that would account for the complexity of the work spaces of the companies. large companies and actually existing labor subjects. What has been described—and that is usually the emphasis in Foucault's work—is a logic and rationality of corporate governance, whose characterization allows formulating fruitful hypotheses and guiding questions for empirical research in large companies and with specific labor subjects, but in no case does it replace said research work. As Foucault (2003) indicated, all rationality of government is always a rationality, historical and situated, that fails, that is resisted and refracted, that is never completed. The analysis of governmentality focuses on an analysis of the programmatic and strategic dimension of a rationality of government, which once put into practice never works as planned, fails to comprehensively cover the field where it is deployed, and has unforeseen effects. and even comes into tension with other circulating rationalities or must be coupled with other logics with which they mutually contaminate (Dean, 2008; Miller & Rose, 2008). About,

Heterogeneous productive rationalization logics whose operation, in turn, cannot be understood if we do not analyze the way in which they are coupled, in many labor contexts in the region, with other logics of government of the population based on the racialization or genderization of important segments of



the workforce. Thus, the challenge of developing empirical research in the specific work scenarios of the large and modernized companies in the region is posed, without forgetting that these companies are only a fragment of the heterogeneous and unequal worlds of work in Latin America, where logics of self-subsistence and informal work, and of (neo)Taylorist-Fordist modernization with its vigorous logics of disciplining and individualized control of bodies, Secondly, it is important to remember that the analysis of governmentality does not in any case imply the assertion of a power that totally eliminates the possibilities of resistance to government devices. On the contrary, in empirical research, it always requires the analysis of the different forms of counter-conduct, subversion or resistance that are established in every field of conduct and that open up, based on a-subjection to new games of truth and the deployment of new self-techniques, possibilities of other subjectivities and modes of existence (Lemke, 2010). The analysis of governmentality is also always that of forms of agency (individual and collective) that politicize a given scenario based on the affirmation of the right to be different and not to be governed in that way, and they open a space for critical problematization of the present that illuminates the historical and contingent limits of what we are and illuminates new possibilities of life (Foucault, 2003). As Foucault wrote in *What is Criticism?*, realizing the centrality of the articulation between power, truth and subjectivity as a key to critically interrogate our current situation, its forms of government and its lines of flight and destabilization:

The heart of criticism is basically made of [and oriented to] the bundle of relations that articulate (...) power, truth and the subject. If governmentalization is truly this movement by which, in the very reality of a social practice, it was about subjecting individuals [to producing them as a particular type of subject]



through mechanisms of power that invoke a truth, well, I would say that criticism is the movement by which the subject attributes the right to question the truth about its effects of power and the power about its discourses of truth. Then criticism would be the art of voluntary insubordination, of reflected indocility. Criticism would ensure the de-subjugation of the subject in the context of what we could call, in a word, the politics of truth. (p. 266)

It is expected to have contributed to making visible the potential of the governmentality perspective to analyze in Latin America the truth games, the power relations and the vectors of subjectivation that characterize the new flexible company, whose understanding is central to the task of thought. critical, to encourage new forms of individual and collective agency and imagine other ways of inhabiting and relating to work in the contemporary world.

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### Footer

<sup>1</sup>We understand the term "modernity" as a category that accounts for a particular historical period that begins towards the end of the 18th century and extends to the present day. As Castro (2011) points out, this sense of "modernity" is what appears in works by Foucault such as History of Madness in the Classical Age, Words and Things and Discipline and Punish. Although in these works the focus is on an epistemic determination of modernity (in rupture with the Classical Era), it is possible to consider that same criterion and understand it as that historical period, from the end of the 18th century to the present day, characterized by the emergence , progressive expansion and consolidation of the governmentalization of the State and its rationality of liberal government (see note 4). The option for this use of the notion of modernity,

<sup>2</sup>In this way, the analysis of governmentality requires attention to the area



where both the micro technologies of the self are articulated, from which individuals intervene on themselves and subject themselves and govern themselves in a certain way in pursuit of certain objectives. , such as macro technologies linked to security mechanisms and the government (from the State and authorities) of the population or certain groups within it (Binkley, 2014; Dean, 2008).

<sup>3</sup>Following Rose (2003) it is important to make the following terminological distinction. Subjectification refers to the processes of production of subjectivity, that is, of subjects of a certain type. The processes of subjectification, in turn, always imply modalities of subjection or subjection to certain truth games and power diagrams that objectify human agents as subjects of a certain type; as well as processes of subjectivation that account for the particular mode of relationship with oneself, one's work on oneself in pursuit of a certain telos, which is configured in the crucible of those same games of truth and forms of authority. In other words, subjectivity is the product of historical and situated processes of subjectification through which, and through logics of subjectification and subjectification,

<sup>4</sup>The notion of governmentality<sup>4</sup> can be understood, in a limited sense, as the logic or rationality of government that defines the historical specificity of the practices of modern liberal States. It can also be understood, in a broader and more abstract sense, as a concept that seeks to illuminate the type of logic or rationality that organizes a certain field of conduct, being able to speak of governmentality beyond the field of liberal technologies. of government. In this article we have chosen the first of these two uses (both present in Foucault's work) (Senellart, 2006).

<sup>5</sup>Talking about the primacy of security mechanisms does not mean that



sovereignty or disciplinary mechanisms cease to exist, but rather that they have a more limited role in certain areas of social life and that, above all, they are coupled with and They operate "at the service of" the predominant vector given by the security mechanisms.

<sup>6</sup>As was lucidly indicated by one of the anonymous reviewers, it would have been possible, and in some ways desirable, to organize the exposition of this section based on those same three axes. It has seemed to us, however, that organizing the argument into four diverse aspects of the rationality of governance of the flexible company, in which the three axes converge in different ways, allows us an approach, although less systematic, that is more in dialogue with the field. of work studies and more fruitful in order to understand, from different angles, the effect in the field of labor subjectivities of the flexible company.

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