

The *dispositif* of age, the historical production of the old age, and regimes of subjectification: A genealogical tracking¹

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Abstract: This paper discusses the historical production of the old age considering the *dispositif* of age. A genealogical tracking is outlined in order to point out some lines that have configured statements about the old age, especially in biopolitical contexts. It is emphasized how the discourses of truth about the old age do produce regimes of subjectification and constitute subjects from normalizing and generalizing references. Starting from the deconstructing of discourses regarding the old age, it is indicated the possibility of considering the experiences of the old age aside from the forms of tutelage and from the forms of calculated management of life.

Keywords: old age, *dispositif*, subjectivity, discourse, social psychology.

Introduction: the discursive proliferation about old age

“Old age”, “third age”, and “elderly” are categories and ideas of extremely wide range in social discourse, in institutions, in the media, in people’s way of acting and interacting to each other. At first, they seem like self-evident dimensions of life, since aging would be an “ontological” issue, “intrinsic” to human existence. There are, in fact, major concerns, controversies and a discursive proliferation on the topic of old age and the subjects who embody the marks of time.

The concerns surrounding the human finitude and the bodily transformations resulting from the effect of time on matter appear as producers of discourses founded on several fields of knowledge: medicine, religion, psychology, law, philosophy, anthropology, etc. However, it is in the field of science, especially medical and biological sciences, that we observe the hegemony of discourses that enunciate truths about old age and about the body: *healthy* old body, *productive* old body, *machine* old body, *active* old body, *normal* old body, *young* old body, *old* old body, etc.

We have considered age (or age markers) as a *dispositif* that (dis)organizes, controls, homogenizes, governs, regulates and normalizes the social field, as can be seen in recent works of some researchers (Amaral, 2012; César, 2000; Debert, 1999; Pocahy, 2011, 2011a; Pretto, 2013; Rodrigues, 2010; Sais, 2011; Santos, 2012a; Tótor, 2013). Such *dispositif* produces visibilities and enunciates certain forces, while making others invisible and silencing them.

In this sense, there is the exercise of effects of constitution of the subjects that are marked by discursive and material flows, in a field of power and knowledge relations. Therefore, we agree with Fernando Pocahy (2011a), who suggests that the biopolitical project not only invented the *dispositif* of sexuality, “but also produced gender and age as a more or less heterogeneous set comprising discursive and/or nondiscursive practices of objectification, through control, standardization and regulation of the subjectivities” (Pocahy, 2011a, p. 196).

The notion of *dispositif*, therefore, seems relevant to us in analyses that seek to understand the forms of objectification of the subject, the production of the margins in which they are allocated and the modes of resistance and subjectivation arising as ethical strategies in the constitution of self. Thus, we find the concept of *dispositif* a possible analytical tool to work intersections between age/generation and other social markers of difference, as sexuality and gender, as some authors have sought to do from different perspectives (Amaral, 2012; Amaral & Toneli, 2013; Duque, 2009; Henning, 2014; Pocahy, 2011; Antunes, 2013; Santos, 2012a; Santos & Lago, 2013).

But what would a *dispositif* be? First, it must be said that this is a concept used by Michel Foucault in his genealogical works, those in which the philosopher sought to trace the conditions of possibility of appearance of certain practices, institutions and power relations. In *Microphysics of Power* (1979, p. 244), the author defines *dispositif* (apparatus) based on three senses:

athoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions—in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the apparatus.

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The apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements.

By defining the nature of the relationship that may exist between these heterogeneous elements, the author resumes its definition:

a particular discourse can figure at one time as the programme of an institution, and at another it can function as a means of justifying or masking a practice which itself remains silent, or as a secondary re-interpretation of this practice, opening out for it a new field of rationality. In short, between these elements, whether discursive or non-discursive, there is a sort of interplay of shifts of position and modifications of function which can also vary very widely. Thirdly, I understand by the term “apparatus” a sort of—shall we say—formation which has as its major function at a given historical moment that of responding to an urgent need. The apparatus thus has a dominant strategic function. (Foucault, 1979, p. 244)

Dispositifs may include a plurality of forces and act diffusely to maintain an order and a social norm. Their control processes arise from functional determination, having positive or negative effects, in a relation of resonance and/or contradiction in which heterogeneous elements need continuous rearticulation and adjustment.

Deleuze (1989), in his reading of the Foucauldian concept, highlights the multilinear nature of the *dispositif*: a tangle of lines with distinct vectors and directions that would not conform to homogeneous systems. Such lines, always in movement and in a field of tension, are, according to Deleuze:

Lines of visibility and enunciation, lines of force, lines of subjectification, lines of splitting, breakage, fracture, all of which criss-cross and mingle together, some lines reproducing or giving rise to others, by means of variations or even of changes in the way they are grouped. (Deleuze, 1989, p. 03)

Thus, subjects, objects, enunciations and relations of forces are configured as vectors in tension that are not restricted to contours and/or something closed and finished. *Dispositifs*, as *machines of making see and making speak*, constitute curves of visibility and curves of enunciation, i.e., they move forces of the social field in order to clarify materialities (which are themselves discursive effects of the *dispositifs*), composing regimes of truth that constitute and disseminate knowledge and power relations. That means, according to Benevides (1997, p. 185) that “in every historical formation there are ways to feel, understand and say that conform to regions of visibility and fields of sayability. . . that in each period of time. . . there are layers of things and words, forms and substances of expression. . . of content”.

The *dispositif* of old age as questioned by Sais (2011) and the *dispositif* of age as suggested by Pochay (2011b) make visible and enunciate the body that ages as a problem of government of self and of others, in addition to producing the forms of (il)legitimacy and (un)intelligibility of the corporeal matter itself. Thus, the discursive production on aging responds to certain urgent needs that some social and political contexts require, as we will point out later. The *dispositif* of age sheds light on the bodies and requires from them an arsenal of techniques of self-knowledge, self-regulation, self-control and self-vigilance. The subjectivation of regimes of truth that adopt age as a regulatory marker in the production of subjects will mold to the subjectivities and to an apparent subjective interiority, molding fictions that regulate so-called legitimate modes of existing from well-delimited age group demarcations. That is how we see the rise, in the West, of the feeling and the notion of childhood (Áries, 2006; Rodrigues, 2010), of adolescence (César, 2000), of the elderly and senior citizen (Debert, 1999; Peixoto, 1998; Tótor, 2013; Sais, 2011) and, concomitantly to these classifications and categories, their respective regimes of subjectivation.

Dispositifs produce a series of concepts, objects and statements that circulate among the most different institutions, settling layers of knowledge and acting in the constitution of bodies and subjectivities. The lines of force of the *dispositifs* make them gain consistency while rectifying and/or tensioning the political field of power relations; they cross the entire *dispositif* and modernize truth games.

In our text, we took a genealogical bet as methodological principle for an analysis of power, as suggested by Michel Foucault in many of his works. A genealogy, or to be less pretentious, a genealogical tracking of old age, requires that we look at some ruptures and discontinuities in the productions of knowledge and of discourses about how old age was gradually established as an object of government and scientific knowledge. Therefore, we attempted to dedisciplinarize that which some disciplines have stated as universal. According to Ana María Fernández:

Desdisciplinar implica complejos procedimientos elucidatorios: *desnaturalizarlos* dominios de objeto instituidos sin por ello invalidar los conocimientos que ellos han producido y producen. Supone, a su vez, *deconstruir* las lógicas desde donde han operado sus principios de ordenamiento, así como también *genealogizar*, o al menos realizar algunos *rastros genealógicos que permitan interrogar los a priori desde los que un campo de saberes y prácticas ha construido sus conceptualizaciones*. (Fernández, 2008, p. 28, emphasis added)

That is, comprehending old age from a historical ontology of ourselves in relation to a field of knowledge and of power that constitutes us as subjects. Thus, we outlined a few lines that gradually indicated how aging turned into a focal object for populational management

and sociopolitical concern, not necessarily by a “linear advance” of a mentality that deals with the multiplicities of experiencing old age, but more by a rationality of government that seeks tutelage, massification and homogenization of the inner body of populations. According to Foucault, genealogy would struggle against a supposedly true and scientific knowledge possessed and/or claimed by some people. “It is really against the effects of the power of a discourse that is considered to be scientific that the genealogy must wage its struggle” (Foucault, 1999, p. 14). By determining some of the lines of that which would be characterized as a *dispositif* of age(s), we seek to find the discursive productions on old age within a hierarchy of legitimacies that was gradually established in the scientific field (as well as in the legal and moral field). With this, we seek to raise a critical discussion on some contemporary statements on aging that, sometimes, are disseminated displaced from their historicity and are perpetuated as unitary discourses, often in a naive and universalist way. According to Foucault (1999):

By comparison, then, and in contrast to the various projects which aim to inscribe knowledges in the hierarchical order of power associated with science, a genealogy should be seen as a kind of attempt to emancipate historical knowledges from that subjection, to render them, that is, capable of opposition and of struggle against the coercion of a theoretical, unitary, formal and scientific discourse. It is based on a reactivation of local knowledges – of minor knowledges, as Deleuze might call them – in opposition to the scientific hierarchisation of knowledges and the effects intrinsic to their power: this, then, is the project of these disordered and fragmentary genealogies. (p. 15)

Considering this, we will make some observations about discursive productions regarding old age to subsequently trace a genealogical tracking (Fernández, 2008) on the production of old age based on the *dispositif* of age.

Observations on the issue of old age

Questioning old age in the field of social sciences and humanities requires a view that considers the ways in which it was treated throughout history and the discourses that enunciated it as an matter of management and control of bodies and populations. If in certain historical strata aging was considered the fatality of a natural biological stage that represented the decline of vital functions, in other contexts, more contemporary, advanced phases of life are reinvested with meanings that confer a positive character to aged bodies, producing subjects endowed with productive capacity. However, as signaled by some critics such as Guita Debert (1999) and Francisco Ortega (2008), those subjects are divested of political potency, made docile and often infantilized.

As already pointed out by Simone de Beauvoir (1990) in her classic study of the condition of older people in France, claims that try to generalize old age must be rejected. As the author tells us, we cannot define *the* old age: “it takes a multiplicity of facets, irreducible to each other” (Beauvoir, 1990). What aspects would those be? Beauvoir stresses the issue of classes: the condition between exploiters and exploited would create a crucial gap in the differentiation between modes of experiencing aging. The position of social class, analyzed by authors like Beauvoir (1990) and Bosi (1994), was taken as a determinant for the situation of complete abandonment and poverty or for the possibility of receiving care. Recently, authors have discussed old age based on other important aspects such as gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity, mental health, mobility, institutionalization, socialization, work, consumption.

The analysis of localized realities has thus raised the consideration of multiple differences that, articulated, constitute historical subjects in their singularities. Adriana Piscitelli (2008) examines the emergence of the category “intersectionality”, which has been gaining prominence in studies of feminism and gender theorists, as an alternative for consideration of the multiplicity of differentiations that permeate the social sphere and constitute historical and singular subjects in it, in different positions in relation to hierarchies of power. According to Kimberlé Crenshaw (2002), “‘intersectionality’ . . . seeks to capture both the structural and dynamic consequences of the interaction between two or more systems of subordination” (p. 177). And, as emphasized by Avtar Brah (2006), “real lives are forged out of a complex articulation” in which “class articulates with other axes of differentiation such as racism, heterosexism or caste in the delineation of variable forms of life chances” (p. 341-342). In this article we highlight age, the generational issue of aging, as one of the positions of subject that, as a devalued dimension in societies such as ours, must be articulated, from an intersectional perspective, with the other *dispositifs* that demarcate hierarchized differences in the positions of subjects.

The theme “old age” cannot be reduced to some static determination since it involves a process of change that is always in progress (Beauvoir, 1990). Beauvoir highlights, however, that this is not an unspecific kind of change, of imbalances that are reconquered, but a more specific change: “something irreversible and unfavorable – a decline” (p. 18). Obviously, the author does not disregard the fact that the word “unfavorable” carries a moral judgment. Unfavorable to whom? Beauvoir observes that “there is no progress or regression except in relation to a targeted object” (p. 18). Hence, we can think that old age conforms as such, both discursively and materially, from regulatory systems and systems of intelligibility of the body. Persons of the same age can be considered old or not, depending on the social context in which they live, the ways their body is enunciated, the stylized performativities. According to Beauvoir (1990):

aging will not be spoken of while deficiencies remain sporadic and easily circumvented. When they acquire importance and become irreparable, then the body is fragile and more or less powerless: one can say, without equivocation, that it declines. (p. 19)

But if this “decline” in some historical contexts meant something inevitable and regrettable, in others it may be taken as object of attention to oneself, of vigilance and of denial of one’s own finitude. That which is considered “decadent” will depend on the valuations on the body that a particular social group produces. In a Western, modern and capitalist society, like ours, that overestimates youth, the productive body and some normative standards of beauty, old age will be avoided, either through medical and pharmacological technologies, or through social technologies aimed at standardizing and normalizing the old body (Ortega, 2008). Therefore, in our contemporary culture, the problem of “decline” is regarded very differently than a few decades ago.

In general, the issue of old age lies in a field of discussions about, among other things, the body, family, loneliness, quality of life, health, public and private spaces, death and finitude. These themes appear socially as something to be avoided, preferably silenced, as objects of political investment on the part of social movements, public policies and market dynamics. A tension is observed between discourses, some of which enunciate old age as a critical stage of life, others exalt this age group as a moment of rest from work to enjoy the pleasures that one could not have before and to live what has been called in Brazil the “best age” (Lago, 2006). This confluence of discourses arises from historical shifts in relation to ways of representing old age and to the construction of the idea that the older population layer must be the subject of concern and social management. Debert (1999) points out that contemporary studies about old age are marked by two antagonistic models to think about aging:

the first one constructs a framework pointing out the situation of impoverishment and abandonment to which the old person is relegated, in which is still, mainly, the family that takes the weight of that situation. This model is criticized because it would be, unintentionally, promoting stereotypes of old age as a period of withdrawal because of illness and poverty, a situation of dependency and passivity that legitimates public policies based on the view of the elderly as being sick, isolated, abandoned by the family and by the State. The second one presents older people as active beings, able to provide original responses to the challenges they face in their daily lives, redefining their experience in order to counteract stereotypes linked to old age. Taking it to the extreme, this model rejects the very idea of old age when considering that age is not a relevant marker in defining experiences. . . . This second model, also

unintentionally, ends up echoing the discourses interested in transforming aging into a new consumer market, promising that old age can be eternally postponed through the adoption of appropriate lifestyles and forms of consumption. (Debert, 1999, p. 73)

These two models on which studies on aging focus show that the contemporary view of old age is formed by an overlay of knowledge and visions defining the object “old person” and, therefore, the very notion of body. These views, varying between a scientism, a morality of the body and a rationality of control, were produced from various statements about old age, aging and the body.

According to Vilaça (2000), philosophical views on the body vary between “revealing the body as an obstacle, prison and place of alienation and exalting it as a space of pleasure, as a means of individual and collective liberation”. These two views, or these two discursive matrices from which the bodies are objectified (old bodies, sick bodies, young bodies, productive bodies, docile bodies, etc.) coexist at the same period of time and constitute a tensional vision on the object body (Vilaça, 2000). It is observed, in this regard, that the conceptions of aging are closely linked to philosophical and moral conceptions about the body. Coexisting and coproduced concepts: old age is made visible from the statement of a body that gains intelligibility from an age reference. According to the author, despise or inferiorization in relation to the matter would refer to a platonic hierarchy in which the soul, divine and immortal, would be more important than the material body, fragile and finite. On the other hand, in the Renaissance, modernity and enlightened scientific rationalities, other values concerning the body start to circulate, contributing with concepts in which body health and a great organic functioning become prominent and old age starts to be treated as a problem.

Beauvoir (1990) pointed out that different cultures and societies establish various forms of hierarchization based on chronological ages. Debert (1998) draws attention to the fact that old age cannot be taken as a natural and universal category. According to this anthropologist (1998, p. 50), “the representations of old age, the social position of older people and the way they are treated by younger people acquire particular significations in different historical, social and cultural contexts”. Anthropological research makes clear that the phases of life, whatever they may be, are not substantial categories, but modes of social organization and of symbolically working over a biological process (Debert, 1998; Minayo & Coimbra, 2002). This means that examining people based on concepts such as “age”, “generation”, “maturity” would be something completely arbitrary and subject to cultural, social and political determinations. The system of dating based on chronological ages is absent in most non-Western societies, as pointed out by Debert (1999) from reading the work of Meyer Fortes.

According to Debert (1998), the chronologization of life would be a consequence of modernity that institutionalizes the course of life based on chronological age. According to the author:

the criteria and standards of the chronological age are imposed in Western societies not because they have a cultural apparatus that dominates the reflection concerning the stages of maturity, but by demand of laws that determine the duties and rights of the citizen. (Debert, 1998, p. 47)

According to Alda Britto da Motta (2002, p. 38) “capitalist modernity constructed a segmenting view of the ages: it periodizes generations, constructs and ‘deconstructs’ ages, invents another one almost every century”. But this segmentarity that binarizes us ignores the micropolitics and the possible existential multiplicities, as pointed out by Deleuze and Guattari (2008). Myriam Lins de Barros (2006) also reminds us of that, by showing that research on old age has undertaken an effort to highlight the heterogeneity of experiences of aging and to point out that the periodizations of the stages of life are determined by different standards that coexist with each other.

The modes of classification of individuals based on chronological age establish relations of power that are actualized from the naturalization, essentialization and homogenization of old age. If on the one hand “aging” is connected to a biological fact, on the other hand the experience of aging is discursively constructed, having the effect of activating heterogeneous modes of subjectivation. I have no intention of saying that the “biological body that ages”, as well as any other, is not also inhabited by multiple discourses (Butler, 2002b): it only acquires materiality and intelligibility from its agencies of enunciation. Therefore, not even the biological fact of aging can be taken as something exterior to the discursive regimes, since it is inside them that very concrete realities are produced, as stigmatization, exclusion and abandonment on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the investment of technologies that mask the existence of a body that undergoes a transformation. The questionings that relate the production of the body to regimes of truth and to discursive proliferations are more frequent in the field of gender studies and feminist studies, which have already pointed out, since the 1960s, the problems and consequences of the ideological correlations between “nature” and “woman”. However, as demonstrated by Britto da Motta (2002), the refusal of this bioideological determinism in relation to body, sex, gender, and sexualities, widely discussed among feminists, still does not seem to have affected satisfactorily the ways we relate to old age and see the old body, overinvested of biologicist and essentialist discourses.

If the *dispositif* of age creates conditions of intelligibility (or of unintelligibility) to the subject, that is

because it is subjected to a series of historical valuations regarding the body, to a set of standards and to a field of political dispute about life. Next, we will point out some lines that illustrate these games of truths/legitimacies/intelligibilities.

The *dispositif* of age and the production of old age

With the creation of the Modern State, it becomes necessary to optimize more effective forms of governmentality, be it in the contexts of economy, social control, health, family or in all areas in which the “social” spreads and is made visible, as pointed out by Foucault (1988, 2002) and Donzelot (1986). The institutionalization of chronological age is closely related to changes in the economy (Debert, 1998) because age will be one of the indicators of who is part of the populational layer considered economically active (beggars, old persons, crazy persons and all kinds of “degenerate” and unproductive bodies will need to be “redistributed” by security, segregation and exclusion dispositifs – prisons, retirement homes, hospitals – in order not to disrupt the smooth functioning of the State that needs strengthening). In this sense, grouping populational strata based on age would be a government strategy that would institutionalize the course of life to regulate the stages of life and improve the management of populations. Birth rates, education, employment, retirement, all this can be better streamlined based on well-defined age categories, which are more related to optimization of control than to multiple possible valuations about the course of life. In addition, the dating system based on chronological ages is crucial to the construction of the subject “citizen”, as it will define rights and duties from the age markers. As pointed out by Debert (1998), “chronological age is only relevant when the political and legal framework has precedence over family and kinship relations to determine citizenship” (p. 48).

Old age is then constituted as a biopolitical object, that is, an aspect of life on which politics will focus its actions. According to Almir Pedro Sais (2011), old age is more than a phenomenon of the course of life: it is a *technology* centered on life that regulates the habits and behaviors of the populations. To this author, the concept of *old age, the experience of growing old* and *being old* are not synonymous, but would be the effects of what he considered to be a *dispositif of old age*. However, under which conditions of possibility does old age being to be perceived as a problem and as part of a life management plan? Which mechanisms of power and power relations outline what nowadays is taken as the intelligible (or unintelligible) old subject?

Foucault (1998) shows us that with the end of monarchies and sovereign power and with the emergence of Nation States, the legal power is insufficient for the consolidation of the Modern State. Thus, the power over life, that is, a form of power that makes live and lets die (for a reason of liberal and capitalist State), is more efficient when using the *norms* as control strategies. If the sovereign had power

over individuals, the State had now control over an entire population. The *dispositifs* of domination would not be restricted exclusively to the procedure of law and interdiction. The new mechanisms of power arising from the 18th century, which take life as an object of management, work, according to Foucault (1988), “not by right but by technique, not by law but by normalization, not by punishment but by control” (p. 100).

The conditions of possibility for old age to be thought of as a social problem begin to emerge from the transformation of the mechanisms of power in the West. With the failure of sovereignty systems and with the ascendant bourgeois form of government, that is, with the establishment of the Modern State, the forms of governmentality are no longer focused on destroying forces, but on making them productive. The power of death granted to the sovereigns shifts to a kind of power that maximizes life, with the obvious purpose of constituting a self-regulating social body. Wars are no longer waged in the name of the sovereign, but on behalf of an entire population, for its salvation and preservation. Foucault points to this transition in the mechanics of power, proposing that the conception of this power as law, sovereignty and interdiction should be reformulated to construct an analytical power that does not take right as a model and code (Foucault, 1988). According to the philosopher, the repressive power would be limited and inefficient, as it would be based on an essentially legal model, “focused exclusively on that enunciated in law and on the effect of obedience” (p. 100) and which would be incapable of invention, being condemned to always repeat itself, in addition to only having the power to set limits to the individuals (Foucault, 1988).

This new form of power over life, which Foucault (1988) called *biopower*, was developed in the 18th century and focuses on two poles: one directed to the machine body, which tames it, makes it docile and draws its strength with the anatomical and political disciplining of the human body; and another one directed to the species body, i.e.:

the body imbued with the mechanics of life and serving as the basis of the biological processes: propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity, with all the conditions that can cause these to vary. Their supervision was effected through an entire series of interventions and regulatory controls: a biopolitics of the population. . . . The old power of death that symbolized sovereign power was now carefully supplanted by the administration of bodies and the calculated management of life. (Foucault, 1988, p. 152)

At the end of the 18th century, biopower established what Foucault called throughout his works a “biopolitics of humankind”. The power acting on the living/biological being, according to Foucault (2002), the power that generates “the nationalization of the biological”, or biopolitics as

a strategy of biopower, is understood as a set of processes and/or problems related to a set of living beings comprised in populations. Thus, the State creates forms of control and technologies to manage populations in an attempt to streamline the problems of the government practice. According to Foucault, then rose the idea of *population* (opposing to the idea of society) as a political and economic problem:

What we are dealing with in this new technology of power is not exactly society...; nor is it the individual body. It is a new body, a multiple body, a body with so many heads that, while they might not be infinite in number, cannot necessarily be counted. Biopolitics deals with the population, with the population as a political problem, as a problem that is at once scientific and political, as a biological problem and as power's problem. (Foucault, 1999, p. 292)

We can see the conditions of possibility for the rise of these ideals in the liberal forms of government, starting in the 18th century, as Foucault shows us in his book *The birth of Biopolitics*. According to the author (2008b, p. 89), “individual accidents, anything that can happen in someone's life, whether illness or this thing that comes anyway, which is old age, they cannot pose a danger neither to individuals nor to society”.

Despite the concern about life being a part of a State project on the rise, this does not mean that since then old age was constituted as a problem of government. There was clearly a selectivity about which lives should be preserved, controlled and administered and which lives might be left adrift. According to Donzelot (1986, p. 54), the major problems that could threaten the definition of a liberal State were pauperism and clashes within the social body, caused by divisions between a “civilized bourgeois minority and a barbarian people that, more than inhabiting, wanders into town and establishes the threat of its destruction”. According to the author, the strategy of ensuring the conservation and training of the population peacefully was philanthropy. Philanthropy, founded on paternalism, is supported from a liberal conception of State and transfers the demands to the private sphere. In this context, the major management concern was children and the government through families, which was propagated through medicine, the social hygiene movement, and some *psy* practices. Old people were considered unworthy of aid and assistance, since they were not useful for the population, given their weak productivity and imminent finitude. With the same type of attention, the care and modes of monitoring concerning women were refined, more than men, because from them would come the children and the care they should receive. Older adults had no priorities because they were not part of the population that generated income. The unimportance given to older people is still present at the beginning of the 20th century, when States, concerned with some waves of low birth rates in families, start to focus on population

growth policies in order to reinforce its power against rival nations (Donzelot, 1986).

These rationalities concerning the government of populations are not restricted to European contexts. According to Renato Beluche (2008), in the course of the 18th and 19th centuries the West underwent a “civilizing” process that advocated the disciplining and normalization of cities. To the author, one of the paradigms of this process was the social hygiene movement, which spread in Brazil with the arrival of the Portuguese royal family, a fact that stimulated a project of urban development, of structuration of “order” and of normalization of urban spaces. Beluche (2008) points out that one of the strategies used by medicine for the construction of the new bourgeois order that was being established in the Brazil of the 19th century was the belittlement of the old person: old people (specifically the old *man*) symbolized the “decadence of man” and a threat to the maintenance of families who should build the nation. Older people represented, therefore, an obstacle to the project of nation.

According to Sais (2011), until 1940 there was little interest in research on aging and this would be directly related to the dominant scientific ideals of progress, which saw in children the promise of national development. In this context, developmental and experimental psychology as well as psychiatry was not concerned with old age, which was understood only as a moment of human involution, decline and degeneration.

The result of these policies that sought the advancement of nations, both demographic and economic, could be seen in the abandonment of the old, as denounced by Simone de Beauvoir at the end of the 1950s. Clarice Peixoto (1998) points out that the older persons of the 19th century were unable to support themselves financially and ended up not holding any social status. With the emerging capitalism, old age became synonymous with disability and the elderly lived in poor conditions. According to the author, among the richest strata, the pejorative figure of the *old person* was erased by the image of the *elderly*, a category that expressed some social status of the senior person. *Old* would then refer to older poor individuals, i.e., most of this population.

According to Sais (2011), one of the factors that made old age become a government problem was World War II, which produced a population gap of adults and a decrease in birth rates, indicating the prediction of population aging. According to this author, it was in the first half of the 20th century that disciplines concerned specifically with old age emerged, such as sociology of aging, the various psychologies (clinical, developmental, experimental, social, of personality) and psychiatry, which contributed with the invention of study fields such as gerontology. Old age, in this context, was synonymous with disease and lack of productivity and aging, since then, became a social problem to be managed. In Brazil, rather than only a medical problem, old age also became the target of economic concern in the political and administrative field when

retirement policies, until then restricted to employees, were implemented with the creation of the Social Security Act of 1960, establishing retirement to “all Brazilian citizens”². According to Peixoto (1998), the life cycle was restructured, then, founded on three major stages: childhood/adolescence, adulthood, and old age, the latter understood as the phase of rest and retirement.

The analysis of the financial cost of aging enters State planning, which begins to seek strategies for economic balance and for maintaining the health of the older population, so this stratum would not require so many expenses from the public apparatus. According to Debert (1998), “the objective now is pointing out the problems that the increase in the elderly population brings to the perpetuation of social life, in opposition to decreased birth rates. Aging becomes a menace, a threat to social life” (p. 65).

At this moment, biopolitical strategies aimed at a governmentality of old bodies are established. Science, “in charge” of this management of old age, creates aging as an object of scientific investigation and, according to Debert (1998), presents multiple dimensions such as the issue of physical fatigue and extension of life, the demographic imbalance and the financial cost of social policies.

Debert (1999) points out, based on the contemporary trend in the processes of socialization of old persons, what she has called *processes of making aging private again*, which “turn old age into an individual responsibility – and, that way, it could disappear from our range of social concerns” (p. 14). Tótorá (2013) also signalizes this phenomenon, highlighting what she called *processes of individualization of old age*. Nothing more tactical and tacit than incorporating the norms to the subjective processes and making the biopolitical rationality of government operate diffusely, horizontally and subtly. In this regard, it is noteworthy that if old age is now an individual issue, it is precisely because the power is exercised much more effectively when each individual becomes responsible for ensuring his or her usefulness and docility to the State.

In the early 1960s emerges the notion of “third age”. Such category implicitly calls the retired person to integrate another stratum of the economically active population, given the potential for consumption that such layer could represent; integrate to consume and to make live bodies that are healthier and less expensive to the State. This new category euphemizes the burden of old age and values *good aging* as an individual problem, a private undertaking. Thus, old age is again a private issue (making old age private again), based on a biopolitical rationality of management of old persons.

With the invention of the “third age” and its ideal prerogatives on the body (*the best age, healthy aging, age of*

2 The first article of the sole chapter of this law says: “Art. 1: Social security, organized in the form of this law, is intended to ensure its beneficiaries the essential means of maintenance, by reason of old age, disability, service time, prison or death of those on whom they relied economically, as well as the provision of services aimed at protecting their health and contributing to their wellbeing.”

leisure, active old age, etc.) a morality about life is now formed and requires behavior codes for the *good old person*, the individual who takes care of himself or herself and is constantly vigilant about his or her health. This subtle tactic to control bodies, perpetrated by this *new* moral, produces modes of vigilance over the body founded on a bioascetical ideal (Ortega, 2008). In general terms, asceticism refers to a shift from one type of subjectivity to another type, to be attained through the ascetic practice. "The ascetic oscillates between an identity to be refused and another to be attained", as stated by Ortega (2008, p. 20). Contemporary bioascetics would relate to modes of relationship with oneself based on biopolitical regulatory ideals. According to the same author:

the forms of subjectivities that asceticism aims at may differ or not from socially, culturally, and politically prescribed identities. ... One can find in most bioascetic practices a willingness for uniformity, for adaptation to the norm and for constituting conformist and selfish modes of existence, aiming to seek health and the perfect body ... Contemporary bioascetics ... replaced the love for the world and the concern for the common good with the narcissistic persona of infinite extension of life and maximization of bodily performances, forgetting, at times, that living in fear of death is being afraid of living. (Ortega, 2008, pp. 20; 25)

The contemporary ideals that regulate the modes of being of the "third age", therefore, are based on maximizing the power of the body, denying its finitude and creating the illusion of a (bio)utopian materiality, which can be achieved from the subjection to medical and pharmacological technologies. Thus, according to Debert (1999), "the ungovernable body, the body's betrayal to the individual's wishes are rather perceived as results of consciously requested transgressions, abominations of human nature" (p. 22). Thus, self-government and self-vigilance behavior codes are established: the old person that escapes the intelligible and medicalized mode of the "third age" is a subject that is blamed for being *bashed*, by carelessness and by his or her own physical decline. Youth becomes a commodity to be acquired by all (regardless of chronological age), either by consumption, by the adoption of lifestyles aimed at the prolongation of life or by biopharmacological technologies that disguise the bodily marks of time.

Ortega (2008) notes that the medicalization of old age, disguised under the category of "third age", created the figures of the *good old person* and of the *bad old person* in consonance with the other bioascetical ideals that produce a wave of potentially abject bodies. According to the author:

the stereotypes against obese persons, older persons and other individuals that do not conform to the standard of the ideal body have the same excluding

and stigmatizing effect. The obsession with a tanned, strong, muscular, lipoaspirated body with silicon implants strengthens the prejudice and makes facing the failure of not achieving this ideal more difficult as testified by anorexia, bulimia, dysthymia and depression. (Ortega, 2008, p. 36)

Some authors (Debert, 1999; Britto da Motta, 2002; Sais, 2011) point out that one of the major problems that emerged from the creation of the "third age" category is the homogenization of a population group that is internally quite complex, including with regard to the age groups that it can comprise. A person aged 50 years and another one aged 70 years are often considered as belonging to the "third age", but these people probably have different experiences in relation to aging. As for homogenization, age markers are not the only way to attempt a massification of the population. Social dimensions such as gender, social class, race/ethnicity and sexual orientation are important lines of subjectivation that should be considered in attempting to keep up with the heterogeneity of experiences of aging.

In general, it is possible to recognize some of the central points in the discursive productions on aging. As we have sought to point out in this text, the representations range between negative and positive poles. Debert (1999) highlights some important periods such as the characterization of old age as a synonym for poverty and abandonment; the idea of aging associated with solitude and marginality; the insertion of old age as an economic problem related to social security issues; and, finally, the culmination of the policies for the elderly.

Given the multiplicity of discourses and the historical, political and theoretical complexity that compose the production of old age founded on the *dispositif* of age, we consider some points raised by Debert useful to be considered in reflections on aging:

how do physical aging or legal age become fundamental mechanisms of classification and separation of human beings? What is the type of tension or the conflicts generated in attempting to create a homogenizing representation of this population? How do different groups and social forces react to these initiatives? What are the mechanisms used to create, through these representations, a social bond between individuals who are in the same age group, and in which situations this bond may be effective in redefining the differences of class, gender and ethnicity? (Debert, 1999, p. 12)

Considering the historical dimensions and discursive regimes in which old age was/is constructed and signified, we cannot think of the experience of aging (or of sexuality, race/ethnicity, class, etc.) without historicizing practices, discourses and enunciations that produce it and constitute the subject. In this sense, we understand that the experiences are possible from the correlation between

fields of knowledge, types of normalizations and forms of subjectivity (Foucault, 1984). We agree, therefore, with Joan Scott (1999) in the sense that “it is not individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience” (p. 27). This does not deny the uniqueness of the experiences, much less the possibilities of agency, but inserts the subject’s very constitution within a historical contingency and a within a field of forces which can be bent and folded, allowing the production of experiences. Experiences would be linked to a historical stratum, whether in the modes of subjectior or it in the forms of resistance and in the very relationship that can be established with oneself.

This is not a story of what could be true in these processes, but rather “an analysis of the ‘truth’ games, the games between the true and the false, by which the being constitutes itself historically as an experience, that is, as able to and required to being thought” (Foucault, 1984, p. 12). We would still add, in line with the thought of Butler (2006, 2002a), that this is a game between the legitimate and illegitimate, the intelligible and the unintelligible, human and inhuman, subject and object.

Old age, subjectivation and ethics: for an experience beyond the norms

But how to escape or surpass such lines of force that bind us to the normative regimes of the *dispositifs* and restrict us to rigid and apparently fixed positions of subject? The alternative that Foucault (1984) postulates is based on ethics, i.e., the forms of relationship with oneself through which the individual constitutes himself or herself as a subject. *Pondering on oneself* is a reflective act on one’s own actions, a mode of subjectivation. That does not imply saying that this *oneself* is a pre-existing dimension of a self-constituted subject. This ethical work, that is, the “manner by which an individual should constitute such part of themselves as main matter of his moral conduct” (Foucault, 1984, p. 27) requires a clash with the lines of force of the *dispositifs*. This happens when the force enters into relationship with itself, that is:

the force, rather than getting into linear relationship with another force, turns to itself, exerts on itself or affects itself. . . . A line of subjectivation is a process, a production of subjectivity in a *dispositif*: it is to make itself, to the extent that the *dispositif* allows it or makes it possible. It is a line of escape. It escapes the previous lines, it escapes them. The oneself is neither a knowledge nor a power. It is a process of individuation with respect to groups or persons, which escapes both the established forces and the constituted knowledges: a sort of added value. (Deleuze, 1989, p. 3)

From the lines of subjectivation resulting from the *dispositifs* themselves (as forms of resistance or as subjection to other norms) we can follow what Foucault called arts of existence and or techniques of the self, which would include:

reflected and volunteer practices through which one not only establishes rules of conduct, but also seeks to transform, modify one’s singular being and make one’s life a work that carries certain aesthetic values and responds to certain criteria of style. (Foucault, 1984, p. 15)

We are, therefore, faced with the complexity of the *dispositifs*: they comprise relations of forces of knowledge and power, which conform, legitimize and authorize certain practices; and lines of subjectivation, which make individuals recognize themselves (or not) as subjects. They are multiplicities and as such cannot function as predictive factors with regard to the productions of subject that they make possible. This means that the cartographies of the *dispositifs*, tracing their map (always moving), untangling and following their lines, lead us to unknown lands, to the heterogeneity of the bodies.

Thinking and producing possible old ages that exceed or at least resist the normative modulations of power *dispositifs* would be a way of confronting the massification and serialization of capitalistic subjectivities (Guattari, 1992). An alternative to discuss the experiences of old age, beyond homogenizing perspectives that only respond to a desire for management and tutelage of old bodies, is to consider the singularities of experiences of old ages based on categories of articulation or intersectional categories, as proposed by some feminist theorists (Crenshaw, 2002; Brah, 2006; Piscitelli, 2008). Intersectionality enables considering the complexities and imbrications of the social, political and historical forces that produce the subjects and the processes of marginalization and exclusion.

In our previous works, for example, we questioned the stylizations of homoeroticism and homosexuality in old age, thus articulating categories such as age, gender, and sexuality (Santos, 2012a, 2012b; Santos & Lago, 2013). We analyzed how bodies, desires and eroticism find ruptures and alternative matters of expression, even facing some ghosts of abjection that haunt the lives of older homosexual men (Santos & Lago, 2013). In his latest works, Fernando Pocahy (2011, 2011a) has also been questioning the possible homosexuality and homoeroticism from the experience of old age, pointing out some forms of social arrangements as contestation strategies in relation to totalizing significations about old age and homosexuality. In general, what these works have demonstrated is that old age can be lived based on ethics and aesthetics that affirm the power of old age, as suggested by Tótoro (2013), that is, as a pondered way of conduct not restricted to the forms of tutelage and management of life.

O dispositivo da idade, a produção da velhice e regimes de subjetivação: rastreamentos genealógicos

Resumo: Este artigo problematiza a produção histórica da velhice a partir do dispositivo da idade. Traça-se um rastreio genealógico que visa apontar algumas linhas que foram configurando enunciados sobre a velhice a partir de diversas correlações de forças, especialmente em contextos biopolíticos. Destaca-se como os discursos de verdade que enunciam a velhice produzem regimes de subjetivação e constituem sujeitos a partir de referenciais normalizadores e massificadores. A partir da desconstrução dos discursos relativos à velhice, aponta-se para a possibilidade de considerar as experiências das velhices para além das formas de tutela e de gestões calculistas da vida.

Palabras clave: vejez, dispositivo, subjetividad, discurso, psicología social.

Le dispositif de l'âge, la production de la vieillesse et régimes de subjectivation: traçages généalogiques

Résumé: Cet article met en question la production historique de la vieillesse en partant du dispositif de l'âge. Un traçage généalogique est fait afin de signaler quelques lignes qui édifient des énoncés sur la vieillesse à partir de plusieurs corrélations de forces, en particulier dans des contextes biopolitiques. On souligne comment les discours de vérité qui énoncent la vieillesse produisent des régimes de subjectivation et constituent des sujets selon des référentiels normalisateurs et massificateurs. À partir de la déconstruction des discours liés à la vieillesse, on signale la possibilité de considérer les expériences de vieillesse au-delà des formes de tutelle et de gestions calculatrices de la vie.

Mots-clés: vieillesse, dispositif, subjectivité, discours, psychologie sociale.

El dispositivo de la edad, la producción de la vejez y regímenes de subjetivación: rastreos genealógicos

Resumen: Este artículo problematiza la producción histórica de la vejez a partir del dispositivo de la edad. Se delinea un rastreo genealógico que busca apuntar algunas líneas que fueron configurando enunciados sobre la vejez a partir de diversas correlaciones de fuerzas, especialmente en contextos biopolíticos. Se destaca como los discursos de verdad que enuncian la vejez producen regímenes de subjetivación y constituyen sujetos a partir de referenciales normalizadores y masificadores. A partir de la deconstrucción de discursos relativos a la vejez, se apunta para la posibilidad de considerar las experiencias de la vejez para más allá de formas de tutela y de gestiones calculistas de la vida.

Palabras clave: vejez, dispositivo, subjetividad, discurso, psicología social.

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