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A RELATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON CULTURE AND SOCIETY

The tech entrepreneur in Colombia: a discussion of actor-network-theory, Lacanian theory and social imaginaries

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Abstract

The figure of the tech entrepreneur has gained special relevance in the contemporary world. Recognized stories of success such as those of Steve Jobs, Bill Gates and Mark Zuckerberg have popularized worldwide the imagination of the young student who starts a garage company with nothing more than his own passion, intelligence and determination, and becomes a global celebrity and a billionaire in just a few years. Nevertheless, the discourses and cultural productions that shape this figure do not always adhere to empirical consequences and factual data, but in fact, are the result of some processes determined by the desires and dreams of those who construct and transmit it (entrepreneurs, entrepreneurship gurus and experts, advertisers, government agencies, etc.), as well as those who consume it (young people with entrepreneurial aspirations). In this process of analyzing the "material/empiric" dimension of the figure of the tech entrepreneur in contrast with the "symbolic/imaginary" dimension, this article proposes a theoretical discussion between the Actor-Network-Theory, the Lacanian psychoanalysis and the Social Imaginaries theory. Based on the work by Lacan, Latour and Taylor and recurring to interviews applied to tech entrepreneurs in Colombia in different stages of development, it is concluded that the symbolic/imaginary dimension plays a fundamental role in structuring the contemporary figure of the tech entrepreneur with important implications at the level of the material/empirical reality, insofar as it shapes actions and objects. Thus, the Lacanian theory and the Social Imaginaries constitute two fundamental frameworks of analysis that contribute to understanding more comprehensively how the tech sector works as well as what sort of technological objects are created.

Keywords

tech entrepreneurship, actor-network-theory, social imaginaries, Lacanian psychoanalysis

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El emprendedor de tecnología en Colombia: una discusión de la teoría actor-red, los imaginarios sociales y la teoría lacaniana

Resumen

La figura del emprendedor tecnológico ha ganado especial relevancia en el mundo contemporáneo. Historias de éxito reconocidas, como las de Steve Jobs, Bill Gates y Mark Zuckerberg, han popularizado el imaginario del joven estudiante que comienza una compañía de garaje con nada más que su propia pasión, inteligencia y determinación, y se convierte en una celebridad mundial y un multimillonario en pocos años. Sin embargo, los discursos y las producciones culturales que dan forma a esta figura no siempre obedecen a consecuencias empíricas y datos fácticos del sector empresarial, sino que, de hecho, son el resultado de algunos procesos determinados por los deseos y las fantasías de quienes la construyen y transmiten (emprendedores, gurús y expertos en emprendimiento, publicistas, agencias gubernamentales, etc.), así como de aquellos que la consumen (jóvenes con aspiraciones de emprendimiento). En el proceso de análisis de la dimensión "material/empírica" de la figura del emprendedor, en contraste con la dimensión "simbólica/imaginaria", este artículo propone una discusión teórica entre la Teoría del Actor-Red, el psicoanálisis lacaniano y la teoría de los imaginarios sociales. Con base en el trabajo de Lacan, Latour y Taylor, y recurriendo a entrevistas aplicadas a emprendedores de tecnología en Colombia en diferentes etapas de desarrollo, se concluye que lo simbólico/imaginario juega un papel fundamental en la estructuración de la figura contemporánea del emprendedor de tecnología, con importantes repercusiones a nivel de la realidad material/empírica en la medida en que moldea acciones y objetos. Por lo tanto, la teoría lacaniana y la teoría de los imaginarios sociales constituyen dos marcos fundamentales de análisis que contribuyen a comprender de manera más comprensiva cómo funciona el sector tecnológico y qué tipo de objetos tecnológicos se crean.

Palabras clave

emprendimiento tecnológico, teoría del actor-red, imaginarios sociales, psicoanálisis lacaniano

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1. Introduction

Located in the northwestern corner of South America, Colombia is a country historically recognized for its biodiversity, music and coffee plantations. After several decades of internal conflict caused by drug trafficking and the actions of guerrilla groups, the country has gone through two peace processes (the first with paramilitary groups in 2006 and the second with the FARC[1] in 2016) that have resulted in greater political and social stability. As a consequence, its economy has rebounded in recent years to become a regional leader with significant prospects in terms of foreign investment, entrepreneurship and technological development. In this regard, it is also significant that traditionally Colombians have considered themselves as enterprising, hard-working and "forward-looking" people, as studies by Buelvas *et al.* (2017), Gómez and Mitchell, (2014) and Vesga (2008) have concluded.

According to a study carried out by Di Ionno and Mandel (2016), in 2015 in Colombia there were 56.1 million mobile phone subscriptions (116.5 % penetration rate) of which 5.4 million were broadband connections (11.2 % penetration rate). This same study estimates that as of September 2016 there were more than 83,100 jobs in the Colombian app sector and that due to the size of its population (third in Latin America and around 45 million inhabitants), its geostrategic location, its proximity and connectivity with the United States and the government's programs to improve technological infrastructure and support innovation[2], Colombia offers one of the most attractive economies in Latin America for technological entrepreneurship (Di Ionno and Mandel 2016; MinTIC Colombia 2014; MinTIC, ProColombia 2018).

Local startups such as Rappi – which raised a US$9 million Series A round led by Andreessen Horowitz (Nathan Lustig, 2017) –, Mercadoni – which also raised US$9M by Naspers (Martin,

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1. Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC), a Marxist guerrilla group.
2. Initiatives such as Apps.co, which has supported more than 13,000 entrepreneurs in the ideation stage and has taught more than 110,000 specialized courses in technology and entrepreneurship; iNNpulsa, which has invested more than US$80 million to support the development of more than 1,200 startups; and Ruta N, a public-private partnership for the promotion of innovation in Medellin that served as a central node for the city to obtain the title of *"Innovative City of the Year"* in 2012, having beaten others such as Tel Aviv and New York (The Wall Street Journal, 2012) are some of the main government programs to boost the sector.

2017), PayU[3] – which has processed more than $2.5 billion USD in online transactions (Pulso Social, 2016) –, Hogarú and Platzi (both selected by Y Combinator, one of the most important startup incubators in the world located in Silicon Valley) (Pulso Social, 2017), among others, demonstrate the maturation of the tech entrepreneurship ecosystem. Accordingly, specialized media like *The Wall Street Journal* have published articles as to "Why Chile and Colombia Are Startup Savvy" (Simon, 2015) and TechCrunch's "Colombia Is One Of Latin America's Most Promising New Tech Hubs" (Egusa, 2014), pointing out the increasing importance of the local tech ecosystem regionally and globally.

This growing interest worldwide in tech entrepreneurship is mainly due to the conclusions of numerous studies that highlight the positive impacts – in terms of economic development and the generation of progress and social welfare – of technology (Castells, 2009; Ries, 2011; Landry, 2012; Florida, 2002; Scheel, 2014). Accordingly, reports such as the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (Buelvas et al., 2017) and Startup Genome Project (Marmer et al., 2011), recommend countries to continually publish stories of successful local entrepreneurs in order to become role models and stimulate creativity and personal initiative for the creation of startups. These reports also underline the importance of teaching entrepreneurship in primary school and to make it a mandatory component of the curriculum in all professional programs. In fact, in Colombia the Law 1014 was created to promote the culture of entrepreneurship as a central element of the country's plan for development (Ministerio de Educación Nacional de Colombia, 2006).

The above points out that entrepreneurship has become not only one of the main objects of study of the contemporary economic and management disciplines, but also represents a very important concept in the structuration and functioning of today's societies from a political and cultural perspective. In fact, as we will argue in this paper, entrepreneurship is a concept loaded with imaginary and relational components that not only are fundamental for it to function, but that define its very own structure. Hence, a discussion between the relational theory proposed by Latour and the Lacanian and social imaginaries theories can provide a more comprehensive and critical understanding of entrepreneurship, in both the material (real) and semiotic (symbolic) dimensions of this phenomenon.

2. Actor-network-theory: a discussion

For Bruno Latour (2005), one of the creators of the Actor-Network-Theory (ANT), there is no social force that sustains the so-called "society" in the background, but are the associations themselves, between the different actors and objects, which constitute the social assembly. In this sense, it is necessary to "follow the actors themselves" and try to catch up with their innovations in order to learn what the collective existence (i.e. the social phenomenon) is and what methods they use to assemble it. Thus, while social sociology (i.e., the traditional discipline that assumes there are institutions and laws underlying every social phenomenon) can work well with what has already been assembled, it does not work equally well with what is still in the process of assembly, which constitutes a feature condition of current societies.

For Latour the contemporary social phenomenon is no longer a safe and non-problematic field of study, but has turned into a myriad of movements that make it a lot harder to track new connections and generate new assemblies. The main idea of the ANT is that what is often referred to as "social explanation" or "social science" has become an obstacle that disrupts the movement of associations rather than explaining them. Latour argues that in situations where things change slowly, traditional theoretical frameworks work "perfectly well," but that as things accelerate, innovations proliferate, and entities multiply, these frameworks become useless and further mess up the phenomena they intended to study (Latour, 2005).

This type of situation is when the "relativistic" solution proposed by the ANT should be implemented in order to be able to move between the different frames of reference – always dictated by the actors – and follow the traces and phenomena that travel at high speeds. This is an opposite conception of the unilinear tradition according to which phenomena occur based on a law of evolution that reproduces and repeats itself indefinitely and in which, the main object of study is precisely that law. Hence, for Latour a relativistic social analysis has to devise and use a kind of infra-language to be able to move from one frame of reference to another, while listening directly to the actors (Latour, 2005). In consequence, the word "social" not only cannot replace any association by itself, but also cannot express better any kind of phenomenon of association. The social matter for Latour is not a common measure, but it simply implies a movement that can be learned indirectly when there are changes (even if they are very small) that mutate the previously established associations; thus, for the ANT it is a question of taking seriously the small differences between associations that, ultimately, are the ones that generate the social and can account for it.

Latour argues that in the traditional definition of social science, no extra effort is required for associations to hold together – as social is something already given – and, moreover, the influence of the analyst does not seem to matter at all or is merely considered as a factor that disturbs, and should be wholly minimized. Instead, the ANT obtains the benefit of departing from an opposite view,

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3. Online payment service.

in which it is necessary to pay greater attention to the required means that incessantly hold the groups together – although not static and indefinitely – and also considers the implications and effects of the position of the analyst (2005).

For the ANT, each interview, each narration, and each comment made by the actors regarding their activities, as trivial as they may seem, provides the analyst with a bewildering set of entities that serve to account for the how and why associations are created and maintained. From this perspective, analysts of the social must forget their pretention of a meta-language – which is meant to explain everything based on the positivist view of science and ultimately reveal the truth – and start to listen to the actors themselves in their day to day routines. As for the ANT, those who possess the true knowledge are the actors themselves and the mediating objects in their associations.[4]

Accordingly, Latour proposes that the key issue for studying the contemporary social is to decide whether to try to deduce everything from a few causes that were already there "in power", or, on the contrary, whether to replace as many causes as possible by a series of actors and mediators. In this respect, the ANT constitutes a theoretical and methodological approach that takes the second approach and makes the decision to follow the actors, no matter what theoretical or metaphysical muddles they are embed in, and without resorting to any previous laws or analytical frameworks in which to base the empirical fieldwork (Latour, 2005).

2.1. ANT and Lacan: a debate on language

A first downside of Latour's theoretical proposal is the limited elaboration it offers about language and its effects.[5] In the first place, Latour seems to suggest (although discreetly) a monadic origin of language – someone started to experiment with sounds and then others began to follow and reached a consensus on meaning – based on a sort of structuralism and technological evolutionism. The main problem with this perspective is that it doesn't recognize the alien origin of language, the division it causes in the psyche and the impossibility of an absolute understanding (i.e. to reach an ultimate truth). In this regard, the Lacanian posture provides conjectures with greater level of elaboration, which come from the clinic,[6] linguistics[7] and philosophy.[8] Thus, for Lacan,

language by definition comes from the other social and, in this sense, it produces division (between the subject and the object of desire) and a hole in knowledge as a product of the arbitrariness and ambiguity of the significant-signified dyad (Lacan, 1984). In this regard, the proposal of an infra-language and a meta-language becomes untenable in the way that there's only language and its misunderstandings and failures, and judgments such as whether a text is "interesting" or not to include it in the ANT analysis, even based on the criteria of the actors themselves, do not constitute a more valid or truthful material of study. What this implies is that it isn't possible to assume that what the actors say is a pure and transparent truth, which effectively refers to the complete and definitive vision of the social phenomenon being studied (Lacan, 1987, 1992).

Latour also formulates a critique against what he calls "sociology of the social" and "critical sociology", for in these it is assumed that it's the analyst who has the complete picture of what is studied, in opposition to the actors that act innocently of the multiple dynamics and laws that alienate and govern them. This mistake is resolved by the ANT, as the information generated by the actors is not only never ignored or put aside, but in fact constitutes the main source of analysis (Latour, 2005). In consequence, for Latour there is no division between the social world and the material, or between the human and the non-human, and none can be put in different levels of analysis, as for the ANT, objects have profound implications in the social assembly, not only because they act, but also because they speak.

From a Lacanian perspective, this monadic scheme of unity between the social and the material is transformed into a triadic structuring of reality, composed of 1) the symbolic, 2) the imaginary and 3) the real.[9] Accordingly, a critical approach based on a Lacanian perspective doesn't leave aside the information coming from the actors – of which Latour rightly stresses its importance –, but gives it an even greater significance, not only considering its semiotic/symbolic dimension,[10] but also the profound implications at the level of the imaginary – which points to the phantasm that sustains desire and action – and the real – which refers to the body and its symptoms –; the traces, the actors and the objects themselves become categories mediated by language and the ANT theory can be analyzed (and practiced) as a discourse as well, which implies, in turn, that it has to admit it makes a hole in knowledge and produces residues not possible to symbolize (and

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4. Which, in effect, also act and speak.
5. It should be noted that Latour himself emphasizes the importance of telling stories in the work of the ANT.
6. To review some current papers about the effectiveness of psychoanalysis (Tamez, 2017; Knekt et al., 2011; Shepherd and Beail, 2017)
7. Mainly Jakobson (1959, 1960)
8. Including the works of Badiou, Zizek, Copjec, Kristeva, Butler, among others.
9. From the Lacanian theory it is important to differentiate between reality – that which is symbolically reached by consensus – and the real – that which has effects, but which cannot be symbolized. For further elaboration on this topic, see Evans (1997); Lacan and González (2005).
10. In other words, what Latour has deemed as the goal of the new social science, which has to limit itself to description only.

analyze).[11] In this regard, Latour wonders if social sociologists are so foolish as to believe that there is another world behind the real, to which the Lacanian theory would answer that indeed there is, which has been demonstrated by the psychoanalytic clinic – in addition to other post-structuralist schools – and that the foolish, or better, the naïve thing, would be to think that language is a neutral medium that transmits an objective and pure reality, and that actors know exactly what they want to say and how.

As has already been pointed out, the foregoing doesn't imply that the analyst is the subject where the truth rests – since, for Lacanian theory he is only recognized as a subject supposed to know positioned to help to build the truth from the patient/actor perspective (Lacan, 1960) –, nor does it imply that psychoanalysis assumes a kind of evolutionism of the social laws that govern the actors and that would ultimately allow to explain the social world in absolute terms.[12] Hence, a critical analyst based on a Lacanian perspective, assumes there's no absolute truth, no univocal realities, and that an eventual fake consciousness or veil of the real has important implications in structuring reality and letting desire flow and action being carried out.[13]

To this extent, it must be recognized that society cannot be thought outside of language and that it can only be created and represented through symbols and images. In this sense, if for the ANT there are (pre-established) categories such as actors, mediators and networks, among others, for a Lacanian critical approach there is discourse, unconscious, the real, the imaginary, among others, meaning that a "strictly empirical" analysis is simply impossible.

Nevertheless, there are important meeting points between the Lacanian theoretical approximation and the ANT that are worth highlighting. First, both theories depart from the importance of the need to listen directly to the actors. Second, both approaches recognize the importance of objects in structuring the social. Third, both recognize the importance of representations and narratives – even when they are fictional – which serve to build the social. Fourth, both point to the fluid and dynamic dimension involved in the construction of the social. And fifth, both theories recognize the importance of problematizing the position of the analyst within the interpretations that he makes about the social phenomenon.

Therefore, in the following, an analysis of the tech-entrepreneurship sector in Colombia is carried out that includes methodological elements of the ANT – mainly in the way of following the actor's narratives, enriched with a psychoanalytical and social imaginaries grounding.

3. The theory of social imaginaries

Taylor defines the social imaginary not only as a set of ideas – opposed to the institutions and objects that constitute their materiality – but also as the objects, institutions and practices themselves which are produced as a result of the generation of meaning. "The relation between practices and the background understanding behind them is therefore not one-sided. If the understanding makes the practice possible, it is also true that it is the practice that largely carries the understanding. At any given time, we can speak of the 'repertory' of collective actions at the disposal of a given group of society" (Taylor, 2004, p. 25). In this regard, the social imaginary refers to what "ordinary" people – i.e. non-academic – imagine their reality and social environment is, not just in terms of images, but also of the stories and structured meaning that emerge from their everyday life (2004).

Hence, Taylor points out that:

> It often happens that what start off as theories held by a few people come to infiltrate the social imaginary, first of elites, perhaps, and then of the whole society. (…) Our social imaginary at any given time is complex. It incorporates a sense of the normal expectations we have of each other, the kind of common understanding that enables us to carry out the collective practices that make up our social life. (…) Such understanding is both factual and normative; that is, we have a sense of how things usually go, but this is interwoven with an idea of how they ought to go, of what missteps would invalidate the practice. (Taylor, 2004, p. 24)

What guides the production of imaginaries, Taylor (2004) argues, is the ability to recognize the permitted, possible, and ideal conditions of different social practices – in moral, political, economic and religious terms –; this means that in order to think about social imaginaries in modernity, it is necessary to take into analysis the public sphere, understood as the common space, different from the political, in which people who don't know each other meet in order to discuss *rationally* the public events that affect them, their different flaws, benefits and possible paths to follow in order to achieve what they consider the ideal functioning of the social body – mainly in terms of freedom, order and democracy – (Taylor, 2004). "This requirement can be broken down into two facets: (1) the actors have to know what to do, have to have (practices in their repertory that put the new order

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11. In other words, that it can't reach an ultimate truth or that it can't finally "make social science come in to reason".
12. In this respect, it's important to remark that Lacanian theory argues there's contingency in the significant chain and it is assumed, in addition, that every subject is the subject of the unconscious in which identity and causal logics do not operate.
13. In fact, the veil of reality – the phantasm in Lacanian terminology – operates and has effects. A proof of this is the contemporary obsession to break through it and have an encounter with the real producing all the symptoms associated with anguish (anxiety, depression, personality disorders, etc.) (Miller, Laurent and Brodsky, 2005)

into effect; and (2) the ensemble of actors have to agree on what these practices are" (Taylor, 2004, p. 115).

For Silva (2014), in turn, the social imaginary occurs when *aesthetics* becomes the dominant function as a way of perceiving and acting collectively. From this perspective the studies on social imaginaries are concerned with the desires and projections of collective affections that are shaped as ways of being and acting socially in specific times and places. The social imaginary is sensitivity that leads to doing, it is a theory of feelings and their collective expression (2006). This approach requires understanding reality as something that cannot be separated from thought in general – that is, from mental creation – because by accessing it, it is already mediated by language.

The corporeal-psychic origin of the social imaginaries proposed by Silva can be found in the Freudian drives that structure as beliefs, which in turn, serve as a guide for the formation of desires that determine actions and produce habits – "laws of action" – (2006). Hence, while in Freudian psychoanalysis drives move the subject, in the perspective of Silva, social imaginaries are set into motion by common purposes (derived from affections and desires) that drive collectives of people (2014). Consequently, *aesthetics* surges to operate beyond articulated language, logic or epistemologies of meaning and becomes mundane, happening increasingly outside the realm of art and installing itself in the daily social interactions; reality, in turn, becomes a collective construction of the multiple perceptions shared by a social group, and the different emotions of that group (fears, hopes, collective fantasies or memories) become constitutive elements of it, whose idea will necessarily pass through everyday processes of micro-perception that will determine the social imaginary as a defined object (Silva, 2006, 2014).

Thus, social imaginaries are embodied in objects that classify and hierarchize the gaze and actions of those who interact with them, while at the same time produce their own stories and structures of meaning. In this regard, the concept of the Freudian symptom becomes essential in relation to an incarnated mind and body (this is a symptom as an effect of language) that is displaced and incorporated in another part of the body (Silva, 2006, 2014). Consequently, Silva, in a similar fashion to Taylor, states that social imaginaries aren't just ideas and illusions different to reality, since they become reality insofar as they produce a social effect through the actions that guide collectivities (2006).

3.1. The imaginaries of the "tech entrepreneur"

Hence, the concept of the social imaginaries of the tech entrepreneur, as proposed in this paper, refers to a series of cultural constructions, social practices and representations created by collective modes of desiring, fantasizing and enjoying[14] that shape the socially recognized figure of the tech entrepreneur. With this theoretical category, it is possible to examine more in depth the inquiry: what is a tech entrepreneur in contemporary times? both from the perspective of the discourse of entrepreneurs themselves – beyond the mere symbolic field and appealing to their enjoyment – and connecting it to the social practices and institutions that materialize theses imaginaries in the form of theory and the public tech entrepreneurship sphere.

Taylor argues that what guides the production of the modern social imaginaries are the different ideals social beings have regarding what a modern state should be and provide – particularly in terms of economic progress, freedom and democratic order (2004). In this regard, in order to establish the imaginaries of the tech entrepreneur, it becomes necessary to establish what the main ideals are, and how entrepreneurs understand them.

3.2. The tech entrepreneur in Colombia

A study on social imaginaries requires to be geographically located, as desires, emotions, the public sphere and socio-historical movements are necessarily dependent and tighten to the space in which they occur (Silva, 2006; Taylor, 2004; Castoriadis, 1983). In this regard, this study of imaginaries is based on the interviews applied in depth to fifteen (15) tech entrepreneurs in Colombia during the years 2015 and 2016, and theoretically structured based on social imaginaries theory (Silva, 2014, 2006; Taylor, 2004), contemporary philosophy (Lipovetsky and Charles 2006; Lipovetsky, 2000) and Lacanian psychoanalysis (Miller, Laurent and Brodsky, 2005; Lacan 1987, 1992). Thus, it is aimed at establishing, according to local socio-historical and geographical conditions, how entrepreneurship is imagined by Colombian entrepreneurs, which in turn defines how they behave and create certain institutions and technological objects.

For Colombian tech entrepreneurs, firstly an entrepreneur should be defined as someone able (and willing) to do everything in a startup. Arturo from OnTrack School[15] states that:

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14. In this article the concept of enjoyment is derived from the Lacanian term "jouissance", defined in his seminar "*The ethics of psychoanalysis*" (Lacan, 2013) as the force that drives the subject beyond the pleasure principle. There is jouissance when the subject can't avoid transgressing the prohibitions imposed on his enjoyment and his actions may undermine his wellbeing, in consequence, jouissance is that which the subject can't stop repeating.

15. <https://ontrack.global/>.

In a startup you have to learn to do everything from writing code, of course, to installing light bulbs and doing accounting. (Santisteban, 2016; p. 129)

Due to the conditions of extreme efficiency and maximization of resources that startups require when testing their business models, entrepreneurs must take charge of all the activities necessary for their operation in the first stages, without incurring heavy expenses in recruitment. Not only are they not able to hire anyone, but co-founders themselves must sacrifice their own salaries and usually resort to the help of parents and relatives to save money on renting and living costs (Feld, 2012; Motoyama, Watkins, 2014).

Secondly, the entrepreneur must be 'agile' and 'intelligent'. For Camilo from LasPartes,[16] tech entrepreneurs should be distinguished by their talents:

Being the best in your area: intelligence, that's fundamental. They have to work well, not only must they be the best technically, in finance, in marketing, but also how they can function in teamwork, and for that there is a lot of coaching. Because, basically, it's like a relationship: talent, teamwork and consistency. (Santisteban, 2016; p. 129)

Hence, the ability to work in teams is a third fundamental factor that defines tech entrepreneurs. In this regard, Elkin from Sikuani,[17] expresses:

The success of a startup relies on a balanced team. A very good synchronized team can do very fast landings, make experiments very fast and achieve fast results, so one can climb faster and faster. If you can grow very fast it's easy to put layers of people underneath who keep running, doing things. (Santisteban, 2016; p. 129, 130).

In turn, for Alan, director of *Founder Institute Colombia,*[18] an entrepreneur must fulfill the following:

Concentration and quiet determination. [In Tappsi][19] they have come out in the press to advertise, but they are very focused on execution, execution; then 'quiet execution', without making much noise. I look to see if they know English, honestly, because I have seen that those who have succeeded know English, and it is not only because of language, it is because they want to open themselves to see, to learn, from

this underutilized tool called the Internet. (Santisteban, 2016; p. 130)

Likewise, Rafael of MensajerosUrbanos[20] adds that the main characteristics that make a good entrepreneur are:

Constancy and focus; those two things combined. If you are going to make a product you have to focus on that one thing and not on ten because then you will not do anything right; then focus, be consistent and have dedication. The second is 100 % discipline, in the sense that everything the startup needs has to be done with discipline. Then you need to test the market, test the model and prove that the team can work together. You have to do that in an organized way, and the other is mentoring and counseling or coaching. All that information from third parties who have already gone through managing a startup and make you not commit the same mistakes. A startup needs the least amount of expenses and the highest productivity with those resources. (…) You have to be very careful with money and give yourself a not so high salary. Within the team, someone who does the core business, i.e., a software developer; is important so that it doesn't represent a cost for the team. In our case, we spent months without a salary before the first investment round because, although the operation was being paid with the income, the startup could not run out of money. At that time, I sold my car, my co-founder went to live with his parents. (…) Age doesn't matter when being a founder, but I believe that founders should be the same age and have the same goals in life and be looking for the same horizon, because the vision of life of the entrepreneur is the vision of the startup. (Santisteban, 2016; p. 130)

Similarly, Rene of HubBog[21] summarizes the characteristics of the tech entrepreneur in the following:

[It requires] someone who thinks that everything that exists can be improved. Engineers and scientists are generally uncreative. Creative people are more like designers, anthropologists, sociologists, communicators, lawyers, humanists, because they understand society better. The problem of the creative person is that he is locked in a laboratory and needs to go out to the street to understand the human being and his needs better from an everyday point of view. You have to solve a

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16. <http://www.laspartes.com.co/>.
17. <http://sikuani.net/>.
18. <https://fi.co/s/bogota>.
19. <www.tappsi.co>.
20. <https://mensajerosurbanos.com>.
21. <https://hubbog.com/>.

problem or satisfy a market need. So we must move from creativity to innovation. A camera in Mars is creative but only until everyone can consume it is innovative. You have to solve something really practical. [You have to] be irreverent. Don't be submissive to what already exists. Do not kneel before what already exists. (Santisteban, 2016; p. 131)

Thus, another fundamental factor that defines the tech entrepreneur is the capacity for innovation to which Miguel from ClickDelivery[22] adds the ability to take risks. Miguel points out:

Normally the first people who get into a new sector are big risk-takers and good in what they do. Because honestly the competition in the Internet is, for me, the hardest. In the Internet, one wants to buy an apartment, and one has a website in mind, and that site covers all needs (…); they start in a city but end up doing it all over the world. Today we use world-class services here. Internet companies tend to be like this, to create monopolies, so that makes any venture on the Internet have a lot of potential and a lot of risk. For example, when we started Domicilios, two months earlier two multinationals had launched their operations in the country; so you are competing against people who are way more experienced than you, and with way more money than you. So I think it's a matter of strong teams, and that's why I think it's so complicated. (Santisteban, 2016; p. 131)

In turn, Mauricio from YoungMarketing,[23] says there are two main characteristics that define tech entrepreneurs:

At YoungMarketing we are always in the way of testing and experimenting, and we are always looking for how something might work and how we can get resources to do it. Our work is to test, test and test to get a product, but we do it with the support of an organization, which is either a brand or an entity that wants to solve something. Here, I have what I call 'un parche',[24] I have a network. We make hackathones, we gather people to do things, we co-create, and we network (not networking) in order to create, and spark thinking about the world, and also to make money, but for the good. For me, a startup is a man who wants to sell 'empanadas' around the corner; to live in startup mode is to live in risk mode and be exposed to generating new ideas. (Santisteban, 2016; p. 131, 132)

In these same terms also speaks Sebastián, CEO of TuProyecto, who argues that the main mistake entrepreneurs make is not experimenting and validating their ideas, and letting themselves get carried away by unfounded intuitions:

The important thing is to know that when you're in front of a customer you have to be very flexible. In regards to entrepreneurship, they use to say 'insist, persist and never give up', which is fine when one has encountered something that solves a need, but it's not right when one doesn't know what one is doing. But everything else should be questionable. One should not have beliefs but only ideas, one should not believe in anything that has no foundation. The only one in charge is the customer, it's the user, and the one thing to do is to figure out how to react to that. (Santisteban, 2016; p. 132)

And then he adds:

I think we have to make [experimental entrepreneurship] something that is general culture. That is, something that is very, very digestible, (…) that becomes so common that everyone can understand it, and eventually becomes collective knowledge. Because it is a much more scientific way of doing things, and makes one not incur many of the mistakes that others have already made. (Santisteban, 2016; p. 132)

3.2.1. The imaginary of "success"

When asked about how to successfully create technology and introduce it to the market, Colombian tech entrepreneurs demonstrated a broad knowledge of all the most important theories, but with a focus on application in the local context. Thus, Rene from HubBog points out:

Before thinking about products, including the business model, the first thing is to discover problems. How do you discover them? By going out to the market. By asking with an interview? No, you have to go with a MVP[25] that lets you measure the solution to a hypothetical market problem. And there are many cases of that, MVPs very basic, very manual: a landing page, a phone number, an email list, etc., in order to make these type of very primary elements a signal of the market, saying: "I buy, I want, I consume". If that doesn't happen, it's better not to undertake, that is, not to create a

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22. <https://clickdelivery.com/>.
23. <http://www.youngmarketing.co/>.
24. A group of close friends.
25. The Minimum Viable Product is the most basic and functional version of a technological product that can be built and serves to prove that there's an interest in the market for that product. For example, an MVP can be a website with the description of what the product will do and a form for the user to leave their contact information in case he's interested in obtaining the trial version, etc. (Santisteban, 2018).

product for a problem that has not been validated that exists in the market. (Santisteban, 2016; p. 136)

These processes of experimentation are evident in other cases like OnTrack School, whose founders manifest:

> We are focused on children, not on tracking packages. Children get sick, they misbehave, and we know this after having done market research. We are now very focused on feedback and technical support. Our customers can tell us 'I do not understand such a thing', 'put a button, etc.', and this differentiates and strengthens us. Google is not going to ride with the driver of a route in Bogotá, they will not install the app on a tablet, but we'll do it, and this experience gives us the advantage, the knowledge of the customer. (Santisteban, 2016; p. 136)

The theory of Lean Startup is summarized by Miguel from ClickDelivery in the following: "iterate, iterate, iterate, and make it faster, move faster" (Santisteban, 2016; p. 208), which echoes what Camilo from Las Partes says about what success really means:

> I think the most important thing is to find out how this digital economy works; and many entrepreneurs stick with the idea of making a product, and that product has a thousand downloads, two thousand downloads, but in the end that is not enough, we are talking about having to reach millions. (Santisteban, 2016; p. 137)

This vision sets the foundations for what can be called the 'new hyper-accelerated empiricist paradigm' supported by technology, which serves as the main guide for the management of tech startups today. Hence, Elkin from Sikuani points out:

> The problem is drawn from the scientific method. There is a lot of talk about many methodologies such as Design Thinking or User-Centered Design but that's nothing different from the scientific method. That is, sit, observe, take metrics, identify variables, etc. All these are just sophisticated versions of the scientific method but in general, it all comes down to observation. (Santisteban, 2016; p. 137)

From the above, it can be concluded that the fundamental factor of success for tech entrepreneurs – which also corresponds with the main theories of management – is the efficient application of the scientific method adjusted for business objectives and based on the proper utilization of technology. Hyper-speed, hyper-growth and global scalability are the mandatory conditions that enable success in the tech sector.

4. The hypermodern subject and the four Lacanian discourses

The foregoing testimonies allow us to establish a connection between the narrations of the actors (in this case, the entrepreneurs) about their daily activities and the sociological, philosophical and psychoanalytical frameworks of analysis that are proposed in this theoretical approach.

On the one hand, Miller argues that psychoanalysis has had a lot to do with the current installation of the hypermodern subjectivity, for when it revealed the mechanisms of repression and drive through the Oedipal metaphor, subjects began to pursue their desire more freely and energetically. The fall of the civilized morale determined the rise of the *object a*[26] to the social zenith which, in turn, meant the abolition of any notion of measure or limit and the subsequent search for unrestrained enjoyment. In this sense, Miller argues that the *object a* comes to fulfill the function as the new compass that orients subjects in the contemporary civilization (2005) – a function that formerly was carried out by the universal meta-narratives of modernity (such as family, religion, working class, etc.) – (Miller, Laurent and Brodsky 2005).

On the other hand, the massification of digital technologies – computers, cellphones, tablets, wearables, etc. – and the globalization of broadband internet provided the platforms for the rapid acceleration and flexibilization of the social, political and economic processes that transformed this contemporary subjectivity. In this sense, Lipovetsky and Charles argue that (2006) the contemporary subject (hypermodern) can be defined in:

> the form of the paradox and that in it coexist intimately two logics, one that favors autonomy and another that increases dependence. What is important to understand is that the very logic of individualism and the disintegration of the traditional structures of normalization produces such opposing phenomena as self-control and individual abulia, promethean

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26. For Lacanian psychoanalysis, the *object a* refers to that which the subject loses with the entrance in the world of language and which seeks ceaselessly to satisfy his enjoyment, nonetheless, without ever being able to re-attain it. It is, consequently, an object that does not exist in its positivity but rather accounts for the void that desire needs to flow; so its existence is logical, not phenomenological, as it refers to the insurmountable division of every subject of language (Lacan, 1987). Although the *object a* does not exist as any object properly (that is, the subject never fully satisfies his enjoyment, never achieves complete happiness, nor obtains his ultimate object of desire), metonymically it indicates the objects of consumption with which the subject imaginary identifies his *object a* (smartphones, clothing, shoes, cars, food, luxury goods, drugs, etc.).

superinversion and total lack of will. (Lipovetsky and Charles, 2006, p. 21)[27]

Hence, the hypermodern subjectivity is characterized as the desire of each subject to achieve his own self-determination in relation to a personalized and differentiated consumerism – produced by the techno-scientific apparatus that, nonetheless, normalizes everyone –, which can be appreciated particularly in the new 'philosophy of immediate happiness' and the 'science-endorsed' guides to solve all the problems of everyday life (how to age better, sleep better, eat better, love better, socialize better, work better, cook better, etc.); this, in turn, leads the subject to demand a greater quantity of more efficient and technical solutions for all quests of life. The role of knowledge in hypermodernity is primarily of the order of the instrumental; it's not a matter of reason or deep reflection as a project of *Enlightenment*, but a demand for immediate operational and useful know-how (Lipovetsky and Charles, 2006).

These new frenetic rhythms of daily life, in turn, stem from the explosion of symptoms of psychosomatic order such as depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, panic attacks, etc., that account for the fragility and disorientation of the hypermodern subject (Miller, Laurent, Brodsky, 2005; Tamura et al., 2017; Sennett, 1999; Jacobson, 2014; Fisher, 2009). In this regard, Jacques-Alain Miller points out that the disinhibition and helplessness that characterize contemporary subjects are the product of the dissolution of civilized morality of the late 19th and early 20th centuries (2004).

From this perspective, however, modernity doesn't die but we attend to its culmination concretized (and broken apart) by an imaginary of universal liberalism, the commercialization of all the ways of life, the fierce economic exploitation of the instrumental reason and a vertiginous individualization. It is a second period of modernity based on its three axiomatic components: a) *the market*, b) *technical efficiency* and c) *the productive individual*, which have been taken to the extreme by harnessing the new possibilities offered by technological development. This cult of technical rationalization overcomes the glorification of collective ideals and, as a consequence of *greater unpredictability about the future*, demands the need to be extremely mobile, flexible and prone to change (Lipovetsky and Charles, 2006).

Based on the interviews, in consequence, we can argue that the modern "rational" subject – as proposed by Taylor – has transformed into the subject "of the hypermodern paradox", and categories such as fantasy and enjoyment, elaborated extensively by psychoanalytic theory, are increasingly useful for contemporary social research as they, on the one side, are useful for establishing

a connection between the subject and the social structures, and on the other, serve to overcome the sheer rational calculation and deepen into the unconscious (Soria et al., 2014; Freud, 1998; Freud, Rey Ardid, López-Ballesteros and de Torres, 1999).

5. Conclusions

In this paper, it has been argued that the modern social imaginary of equality and heterogeneity is ultimately linked to contemporary individualism and to the uniformity of all subjects[28]. In this regard, for Lacanian psychoanalysis what this means is that in contemporary times everyone gets normalized under the domain of consumerist societies created by the ventures carried out by entrepreneurs. Hence, Taylor (2004) argues:

> [but] what was seen in the old view as the source of self-centeredness, private interest, and corruption is now the driving force of a free and equal society. Thus, the entrepreneur is seen as a benefactor. Narratives about such individuals, their rise from rags to riches, were recounted again and again, offering example and inspiration. In fact, the people who gained the greatest respect and admiration were those who both created new wealth and took leadership or contributed to public well-being; the paradigm was set for the successful entrepreneur-turned-benefactor, which has been so dominant in the United States ever since. (p. 151)

However, even though entrepreneurs in fact constitute one of the fundamental agents in current societies as they embrace the values of liberty and equality, and their economic activity is the cornerstone of a new ethic that is supposed to benefit everyone in society (2004), we have identified a clear need for a more comprehensive investigation particularly based on the categories of the imaginary, discourse and actor.

Based on the interviews applied to entrepreneurs in Colombia, we can appreciate that an interdisciplinary approach that includes Lacanian theory and the ANT has shown itself useful as a research framework to think of the discourses and practices that structure the imaginaries of the tech entrepreneur in contemporary times. In this sense, it has been possible to appreciate the fall of the great modern narratives in the entrepreneurs' testimonies and the increasing importance to meet the hyper-speed, hyper-flexibility and hyper-efficiency demands of contemporary markets. Analyzing their discourses from this theoretical framework allowed, on the one hand, to make an approach towards establishing a connection

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27. This and all subsequent citations are translation of the author from the Spanish version of the book (Lipovetsky and Charles, 2006)
28. This is, everyone can affirm his own distinctiveness as long as it's through objects of consumption offered by markets and everyone can carry out and support any sort of cause, as long it's through entrepreneurial ventures in the context of global capitalism.

between the subject and the social imaginaries, and on the other, to locate patterns that should be studied in greater depth – such as the different symptoms that appear in this new structure: global anxiety, climate change, extreme inequality, social fragmentation, etc. –; from this, we highlight the importance of conducting interdisciplinary research to understand more comprehensively this type of complex phenomena.

Finally, it is also important to recall Taylor's (2004) argument about the necessity to see modernity not as a single process, of which Europe is the paradigm to copy and follow, but as one model among many others that aims to build mutual understanding and more peaceful and prosperous societies. In this sense, Taylor adds: "my foundational hunch is that we have to speak of 'multiple modernities,' different ways of erecting and animating the institutional forms that are becoming inescapable, some of which I have just enumerated" (p. 195). In this paper, an attempt has been made to contribute to this goal from a Colombian perspective by expanding the analysis about the different social and cultural aspects that characterize tech entrepreneurship[29] in the country. In this regard, perhaps the most important contribution that the studies of imaginaries can make is to position the subjects in relation to how they project their past and how they desire their future, which also means that in order to build a "better future", we first need to understand how we are going to imagine it.

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29. Some other topics of interest may include the imaginaries of creativity and innovation, of e-government and politics, of e-democracy and freedom, and of course, the imaginary of happiness and success.

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