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Baudrillard on the Symbolic Violence of the Image

In today's increasingly visual and digital cultures, images are ubiquitous and excessive. We live globally in a new videosphere, where images provoke a plethora of visual information. Some public images are like ideological weapons with which a symbolic violence is exerted because their excessive use, tautological form, and imposing information. It is the power of images acting on the masses, namely on their thinking and feeling, imposing ways of being in society, social attitudes, behaviors, and actions. Images are seductive, credible, and effective, even if the messages are not true or are out of context, illusions, or simulacra, according to Baudrillard. Images produce ideologies, illusions, desires and needs, and simulacra. Therefore, Baudrillard's perspective on images of violence and the violence of the images is relevant to understand today's visual cultures. This article aims to relate images to their effects, namely symbolic violence. Images are signs and languages of symbolic violence, which is conceived, transmitted, and shared in the public videosphere. Following a theoretical and conceptual approach based on Baudrillard's texts, the objective is to discuss the visual rhetoric of images of violence and the violence of the images.

Keywords: Baudrillard, Image, Power of the Image, Simulacrum, Symbolic Violence.

1. Introduction

In the current era of images, cultures are increasingly visual. Images are ubiquitous and excessive. We permanently use images in everyday life and social relations. We produce, transmit, and receive images of different natures and functions. The popularity of mobile technological devices, such as smartphones, and the globalization of social networks contribute to the profusion, widespread use, and worship of images as a global iconophilia or iconolatriy. Today, social networks have strong participation of people and they become the new digital public sphere. We live in a videosphere, a kind of a new public sphere of images where visual information and regimes of visibility and understanding regarding the world are predominant.

However, this videosphere tends to become a plethora of visual information. Some images (e.g. advertising images, television footage or press photographs of the war) are like ideological weapons of symbolic violence.

They form a mass culture of alienating spectacle, which is criticized by Debord in *The society of the spectacle*. In the context of this approach and in Baudrillard's perspective, symbolic violence is the intangible force exerted by signs/images. Intangibility is a central characteristic of symbolic violence, which manifests itself in an interactive process and in a disguised, masked, and subtle way. Thus, symbolic violence is a non-physical type of violence, but related to persuasion or manipulation through the structures of meaning regarding the reality (signs/images of power) imposition ways of seeing, thinking, being.

Symbolic violence is not physical. However, it is still a violence because it is an excessive use of a power acting on individuals, namely on their thinking and feeling. This power also affects social relations, imposing ways of being in society, social attitudes, behaviors, and actions. Images cannot be divorced from the visual content they show. They transmit information that is more persuasive and easier to assimilate than words. Several complex aspects of reality (attitudes or details of situations and events) can be better transmitted and understood through a photograph than through a text. Better than in a verbal dimension, images transmit information with more efficiency, even if the information is not true or is out of context or provokes illusion or simulacra. The images show the events instead of referring them as words do. Images are part of a system of production of illusion and simulacra. Following and developing this perspective, it is important to address and frame Baudrillard's theses in today's cultures increasingly visual and digital, but also ideological and simulated. In addition to this purpose and in the light of Baudrillard's thought, this article aims to relate images to their effects, which are symbolic violence. Thus, images are signs (elements or units of meaning) and language of symbolic violence that is abundantly conceived, transmitted, and shared in what has become the public sphere: the videosphere.

Therefore, some public and media images are symbolically violent, unethical and untruth, i.e. manipulated or false. Images exert a symbolic violence since they are based on false, adulterated or exaggerated social representations of reality and they connote strategically constructed, diffused, and shared meanings.

Images express meanings as a habitual and universal language, agreeing with Sartori's *Homo videns: televisione e post-pensiero*, for whom the image is not seen in Chinese, Arabic, or English, because it is simply seen. «The image is pure and simple visual representation» and «to understand an image, it is enough to see it; and to see it, vision is enough, it is enough not to be blind» (Sartori 2011: 13). For example, television images allow us to see everything without one do something or go somewhere to see it: what is visible comes into every house for free and without permission. Television changes the nature of communication, moving it from the context of

the word (as a symbol) to the context of the image (as pure and simple visual representation, i.e. an image that is simply seen). It is how Barthes understands the photographic message, which is universally readable, just by looking at its content. According to Barthes's *L'obvie et l'obtus*, there is a status of the photographic image: «C'est un message sans code» («It is a message without a code»), i.e. the photographic message is continuous (Barthes 1982: 10).

Press photographs reporting violence and war, showing dead, dying, or suffering people, become trivial in modern visual cultures. Therefore, there are ethical implications regarding their visual rhetoric, excessive iconic violence, simulacra, sensationalism, making the real seem less stimulating and violent than their images. Media images are fetish products whose power is in the ways of seeing the events.

This article presents a theoretical and conceptual discussion on the visual rhetoric of images which, based on Baudrillard's perspective, constitute both a power to simulate reality and a violence. Thus, centred on the interpretation of some selected texts by Baudrillard about the power and violence of images as modern visual languages, the objective is to discuss the visual rhetoric of images of violence and the violence of the images.

2. The primacy of the image

After the logosphere (the predominance of the oral word) and graphosphere (the predominance of writing or the printed word), the long development of the technical means of communication culminates in the videosphere (the predominance of audiovisuality), as Debray (1994: 360) explain in *Life and death of the image*. In the videosphere, dissimulation proves the false and suspicion focuses on the unobservable. What is not visible is as if it did not exist. The videosphere is the most complex sphere, with the most effects and the period in which we currently live. It is the sphere of the video, i.e. of signals used in capturing, encoding, transmitting and receiving images.

In the videosphere, images and ways of viewing them (social regimes of visibility) predominate. Information is essentially transmitted through images and easier to understand. Today we have an excessive volume of information in new and technological multimedia and news platforms. Information is also socially constructive of events, making the messages an event as well. There is a growing demand, access, and consumption of information, which is becoming influential in the so-called information society, as if there were only what one has images of, which are transmitted and shared *ad aeternum* in the news media and social networks.

In the current era of images and visual cultures, images are like weapons exerting symbolic violence. Images are a powerful production of simulacra

and symbolic violence. This symbolic violence is based on the false, adulterated or exaggerated social representation of reality through manipulated or false images (signs) and their meanings (connoted ideologies).

2.1. *The violence of the spectacle in the civilization of the image*

The spectacle accompanies the proliferation of images. The spectacle that fills our existence is what Debord (1995: 24) refers in *The society of the spectacle*, i.e. it is «capital accumulated to the point where it becomes image». The cult of the image is a kind of splendour, as images are estimated and practiced as signs of ostentation, exhibition, and spectacle of reality, as Debord refers, which enchant, seduce, and even alienate. The world becomes a stage for autonomous images and «the spectacle epitomizes the prevailing model of social life» (Debord 1995: 13). «It is the omnipresent celebration of a choice already made in the sphere of production, and the consummate result of that choice» (Debord 1995: 13). Therefore, the spectacle is a tendency to make the world no longer directly apprehensible, but seen in a mediated way.

The primacy of the image results in the profusion of the spectacle for Debord. In *Cinema 2: L'image-temps*, Deleuze (1985: 33) states that such primacy of the image is both a civilization of the image and of the cliché, where images are hidden, i.e. where something is hidden in the image. For Deleuze (1985: 32), «[l'image] s'insère dans des enchaînements sensori-moteurs [...] nous ne percevons jamais tout ce qu'il y a dans l'image, parce qu'elle est faite pour cela (pour que nous ne percevions pas tout, pour que le cliché nous cache l'image».

Deleuze's civilization of the image and of the cliché is the civilization of the iconic inflation that rests on redundancy, concealment, distortion, manipulation. In the society of the spectacle, the monopoly is that of appearance. The means and ends of the spectacle are identical. Therefore, for Debord (1995: 15), the spectacle is essentially tautological.

The representation of social and real life is a simulation and carried out through images of the spectacle, such as photographs of violence and war in the press, relating ideology and appearance or false consciousness. According to Debord (1995: 23), «the spectacle function in society is the concrete manufacture of alienation». In Debord's perspective, the spectacle is like an ideological discourse, it manufactures alienation and is an accumulated capital that becomes an image and its own language.

The expression “civilization of the image” was used pertinently by Fulchignoni, in *La civilisation de l'image* (1969). In *Le pouvoir sur scenes*, Balandier (1994: 133) also refers to a “civilization of images” when he states that the civilization of images makes them present immediately and everywhere.

In this article, the word “image” is used to mean the image produced by the human being. As Berger (1972: 10) states, the image is made to conjure up the appearances of something that is absent. Accordingly, a photograph is a selection of a view (out of many possible views) by the photographer. In *Ways of seeing*, Berger points out that an image is a «sight which has been recreated or reproduced», «an appearance, or a set of appearances, which has been detached from the place and time in which it first made its appearance and preserved – for a few moments or a few centuries» (Berger 1972: 9-10). Every image embodies a way of seeing. In the civilization of the image, the violence of the image created by the visual spectacle of the visible resides in the power or imposed regime of visibility that forces us to see the image in a certain way of seeing.

In *Towards a philosophy of photography*, Flusser (1984: 6) considers that images are “significant surfaces” and «in most cases, they signify something ‘out there’ and are meant to render that thing imaginable for us, by abstracting it, by reducing its four dimensions of space-plus-time to the two dimensions of a plane». Images owe their origin to imagination, the ability to abstract and encode phenomena and to decode encoded messages. Imagination is the capacity to produce and decipher the images, the capacity to codify phenomena (Flusser 1984: 6). «Images are mediations between man and world. Man ‘ek-sists’, which means that he has no immediate access to the world. Images are meant to render the world accessible and imaginable to man» (Flusser 1984: 7). However, the images interpose themselves between man and the world. Images are meant to be maps, but they become screens. «Instead of presenting the world to man, they re-present it, put themselves in place of the world, to the extent that man lives as a function of the images he has produced» (Flusser 1984: 7). The observer’s perception of images will depend on his own way of seeing. Therefore, violence in war photographs will depend on the ways of seeing, i.e. the reproduction of the photographer’s perspective (image production) and the perception of the observer (image reception).

For example, when Barthes (2007: 166) reflects on shock photographs and recalls to a photograph published in the *Paris Match* in which a scene of violence and shock is seen (the execution of communists in Guatemala), he warns that this photography will not be terrible in itself, because its horror comes from the fact that we look at it from the bosom of our own freedom. For Barthes, it is not enough for the photographer to signify the horrible to us in such a way that we can feel it.

Referring to an exhibition of shock photographs at Orsay’s gallery (Paris), Barthes admits that most of the images gathered in the gallery to shock us have no effect on us. The photographer too generously substituted himself for us in the elaboration of the theme. Almost always the horror he proposes to us was super-constructed by him, adding to the

fact, through contrasts and approximations, the international language of horror (Barthes 2007: 166-167).

For Barthes, these photographs are too skilful, and the observer is deprived of judgment, as they were afraid, reflected and judged for us; the photographer left us nothing more than a simple right of intellectual acquiescence, says Barthes (2007: 167). Only the technical interest makes us feel connected to these images. Barthes calls it the “synthetic food” already assimilated by the photographer. Loaded with over-indications by the creator himself, the photographs have no history for us. Barthes concludes that the capture of the unique instant appears gratuitous and too intentional, arising from an uncomfortable desire for language, and that photography does not disorganize us when it is reduced to the state of pure language.

A problem regarding the contemporaneity of images is what Balandier calls the “violence of the spectacle”. In the era of generalized communication, violence has become a spectacle. Through the images in the media, violence invades consciences and the individual imaginary (Balandier 1994: 113). Reality seems to enjoy the less vigour than the image (Balandier 1994: 140), as Baudrillard also recognizes.

2.2. *The symbolic violence of the image*

Symbolic violence is a form of violence exerted in an intangible, non-physical way, without physical coercion. However, like all types of violence, symbolic violence does not cease to be violent just because it is symbolic; symbolic violence causes moral and psychological harm. Some elements or aspects of culture can express violence or be violent, like images (non-verbal language) and means of communication. Violence is not an entire culture. As Galtung (1990: 291) elucidate, «by “cultural violence” we mean those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence» (e.g. ideology, language and art) that «can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence».

For example, there is symbolic violence exerted by television images and press photographs when they produce connoted meanings and spread ideologies and myths. Such symbolic violence is a type of cultural violence, according to Galtung’s (1990: 294). Cultural violence is a form of symbolic violence composed by aspects of culture and the symbolic sphere of our collective existence.

Images are signs, a visual language that anyone from any culture can see. There are different expressions of cultural and symbolic violence, whether the tautological form of the images transmitted by the news media or shared and viewed on social networks, or the content impressive

and sensitive shown by images regarding events and situations of violence (e.g. the current war in Ukraine), or the excess of images that circulate in a culture. Photography is an example of a source of cultural violence. As an art, photography is a language, a cultural element, a medium by which violence is expressed. Press photographs must document events as they are, reporting facts and fulfilling the informative mission about what happens.

Images regarding acts, scenes, events, and situations of violence are the reproduction of a symbolic violence or violence of language and its forms. Such violence is based on the imposition of a universe of meanings, according to Žižek (2008: 2). Sometimes the violence of the images is explicit, but other times it is implicit, hidden and the recipients of the images (e.g. the news media audiences) are not aware of the violence or are too insensitive and familiar with the violence either in the images they see either in the reality. Photographs of violence make violence and photographs of violence banal. As Žižek states, it is a violence hidden in the sign (image), in the visual language. The form of violence is in the simple act of symbolizing events, leading to a mortification (Žižek 2008: 61). Symbolic violence is a form of coercion based on the collective recognition of a social imposition.

Symbolic violence is based on the continuous fabrication of beliefs and ideologies in the public videosphere, inducing public opinion according to the interest of those who spread false or out of context images on the internet. Symbolic violence can be exerted either with the publication of images in favour of a dominant narrative or discourse or against it, in a reactionary demonstration to the social norm.

Symbolic violence is exerted by a symbolic power or force, like the image. Images are simulacra and convey connotated messages. The images show much more than what is visible. Therefore, to recognize the current visual cultures and languages is to understand reality as a sign, representation, simulacrum, artifice.

Today, the technological dimension of the images reinforces its power, namely the power to produce the illusion and manipulation, and to make us believe. Thus, reality is prosthetic and clonal due to the symbolic power of the images, which are instantly reproduced and have the persuasive force (visual rhetoric) that generates the tendency to believe more in the images than in what they represent.

The images reveal reality in the most similar, faithful, and isomorphic way between the signifying representation (the image) and the signified represented (the reality), i.e. *aliquo stat pro aliquid* («one thing is instead of another») as Eco (1986: 213) explains. However, not all images exert symbolic violence, but the images of the first Gulf War entered homes around the world through television screens showing the reality of war. The Gulf War was presented to each citizen in a global way. It was as if

the images spoke better than the words and said «here's the war happening live and in colour».

During the first Gulf War, a new way of controlling the symbolic power of the images was asserted over the action of those who capture war images. This war showed that political-military power dominated the power of the images, i.e. the freedom to capture and transmit images, as a new informational order protecting the world of certain images for the strategic interests of the United States political-military power.

In “War and photography”, Jünger (1993: 25) highlights the value of photographs that perpetuate the misery of war. Rejecting this misery would be a betrayal of our moral essence, according to Jünger, as it would be an embellishment of such a serious matter which is embodied by war. Photography is an instrument of technological awareness. Assigning the function of an “organ of social memory” to the image, according to Agamben (1998: 26), makes war press photographs iconic cultural objects, as historic as the events themselves. Representation or hypotyposis of pain, press photography can increase repudiation of war. For example, Nick Ut's Vietnam War photograph. It was in the Vietnam War that the images of violence broadcast on television trivialized violence itself, in addition to constituting the images as images of symbolic violence.

War images stimulate moral impulses through archetypes and become more memorable. War images are records of privileged moments converted into a support that allows the gaze to be preserved. As in the famous photograph of the Vietnam War, recorded in 1972 by Nick Ut for the Associated Press, the image contributes more to increasing the public's repudiation of the war than a hundred hours of televised atrocities, according to Sontag (2002: 18). It is our “political consciousness” and our degree of familiarity with images, says Sontag (2002: 19), that determines the possibility of being morally affected by photographs of the oppressed, exploited, starved, and slaughtered that moves us.

For Jünger, pain is the pretext for characterizing the power of photography to explore the visibility of emotion and the poetry of misery. Between exposing an objectivation or a subjectivization of the world, Jünger opts for the non-objectification of photography, in which the photographer's gaze is extinguished at the time of capture; the *operator* gives way to the gaze of the *spectator*.

For Jünger (2008: 55), the photographic technique is a way of fixing things and, therefore, has the status of a document. «The World War was the first great event recorded in this way, and since then there is no important event that the artificial eye fails to capture» (Jünger 2008: 55). Photography is an “artificial eye”, sensitive and invulnerable, and served this documentary purpose. In *On pain*, Jünger (2008: 55) accentuate the power and insensitive way of seeing photography as a peculiar instrument

or weapon used with mastery. Photography is an expression of a peculiar and cruel way of seeing (Jünger 2008: 56). Photography is a weapon of the worker-type and seeing is an act of assault, states Jünger.

According to the *Merriam-Webster English Dictionary*, violence is “the use of physical force so as to injure, abuse, damage, or destroy” and an “intense, turbulent, or furious and often destructive action or force”. Images of violence are abusive manifestation of that force (symbolic violence). It is also an excessive language. Since the rhetoric of the image is a performative force, the rhetoric of the image of violence exerts an excessive double force, that of the violence shown in the image (the content) and that of the rhetorical strategy of visibility (the way of seeing). The image exerts excessive violence due to its power. The violence of the image emerges as a power of the image of violence.

In some images concerning war events, the spectacle is direct, but also overly constructed, making the images literal, composed of pure signs, instantly readable and unable to disturb us. Literal images are an introduction to the scandal of horror, not horror itself, states Barthes (2007: 168). Images of war and violence published in the press will be literal photographs if they present us with the scandal of horror instead of horror itself. The images of violence, which Barthes calls “shock photos”, constitute a process of mediated observation through which the apprehension of war, violence and horror is conditioned by the composition of the images, as well as by the motivations and intentions of both the photographer, the editor, and the news media.

In addition to violence in events and reality, news media images reproduce another type of symbolic violence present in photography, not in reality. Violence really exists as a social phenomenon, but it also exists in the news media as what is shown by literal photographs of war and violence published in the press, which are supposedly constructed as reality. As a writing of the visible, photographs of war and violence published in the press function as literal and denotative images of the reported events.

What a press photograph show is capable of eliciting interpretation and a feeling of shock, violence, horror for what is shown. Unlike artistic images (e.g. painting or cinema) which follow codes of representation of pain, literal photography is limited to show what happened in a scenario of war, violence and horror, and will raise the impression by simple and full analogical representation of reality. The violence and horror revealed by a press photographs are more convincing and impressive than when depicted in fictional images. Being aware that it is a factual, literal, and faithful representation, just as the situation really happened, the public is more gullible and susceptible, and the image is more impressive than artistic images. For example, the violence of the events of 9/11 and their images transformed our way of seeing and perceiving the violence through the

images. We saw real images of dramatic violence broadcast on television reporting this terrorist attack instead of fictional images from the cinema as we might expect to be. In *The spirit of terrorism*, Baudrillard points out that the events of 9/11 «have radicalized the relation of images to reality» while we «dealt with an unbroken abundance of banal images and an uninterrupted flow of spurious events» (Baudrillard 2002: 27). «The image consumes the event, that is, it absorbs the latter and gives it back as consumer goods» and we might perceive «a resurgence of the real, and of the violence of the real» (Baudrillard 2002: 27). Reality prevails over fiction, because «reality has absorbed the energy of fiction, and become fiction itself», as if «reality is jealous of fiction» and «the real is jealous of the image» (Baudrillard 2002: 28).

Regarding the violence in painting images, in the documentary series *The South Bank Show*, filmed and directed by Hinton in 1985, Francis Bacon, whose style is marked by disturbing images of violence and horror, addresses various aspects of his images, namely the analogical relationship with reality and impressive effects provoked. During the conversation/interview with Melvyn Bragg, Bacon justifies his images through distorted forms of the figures and the themes of violence, horror, and death with images from reality and news media. Against the widespread opinion that his art is based on shock images of violence, horror, blood, and dread rather than beautiful images, Bacon responds: «What could I make to compete [with] what goes on every single day. [...] I have tried to recreate and make, not the horror, but [...] images of realism» (Hinton 1985). He answers that he just has tried to make images of what's going on in the world, like those we see in the newspapers and television. According to Bacon, looking at his paintings is looking at the real world. «Between birth and death... it's always the same thing... the violence of life» (Hinton 1985).

This question flows into the excesses, strengths, power, and violence of the signs/images. The excesses and strengths of Bacon's images lie in their ability to immediately pierce our sensations, as Barthes calls *punctum* the “something” in photography that leads the observer/spectator to have a stronger emotion when seeing the image (Ficacci 2007: 13).

Thus, in the genesis of the act of thinking is the violence of signs over thought (Deleuze 1968: 181). The sensitivity is intense, and this resides in the sign. The act of thinking is, for Deleuze, provoked in the thought when it is stimulated by signs. The classic model of representation based on the concept of sign, whose role is merely representational, is refuted. The sign thus differentiates a thought from the act of thinking. It is the sign that forces us to think, and this force translates into the violence of the sign in provoking the act of thinking as a possibility of creation.

2.3. *Image, violence and simulacrum*

If, for Deleuze, the violence of signs is at the genesis of the act of thinking and creating, namely in the field of art, for Baudrillard the violence of signs is mainly a symbolic violence which is everywhere inscribed in signs, as he states in *Symbolic exchange and death* (Baudrillard 2000: 10). Despite being two distinct approaches, both focus on what the authors define as the violence of signs, which can only consist symbolic violence. Thus, the Baudrillard perspective is more accurate, which does not exactly have to do with the strength of the signs that makes us think, as in Deleuze, but causes a deficit or abyss of meaning. Therefore, Baudrillard's *In the shadow of the silent majorities* warns of the "abyss of meaning", a repeated imperative to produce meaning and moralise information. The masses resist this imperative of rational communication, since «they are given meaning: they want spectacle. No effort has been able to convert them to the seriousness of the content [...]» (Baudrillard 1983: 9-10). Messages are given to the masses, but they only want some sign, they idolise any content so long as it resolves itself into the spectacular.

Baudrillard warns of the "end of the social", identifying this collective demand for new forms of expression, culminating in the apogee of the masses. «*The social has basically never existed.* There never has been any 'social relation.' Nothing has ever functioned socially. [...] seduction and death, there has never been anything but *simulation* of the social and the social relation» (Baudrillard 1983: 70-71).

The current visual and mediated culture brings the implosion of meaning. Conceiving the publications of war and violence images in the media as overlapping simulacra, the appearances shown in the images replace reality and we doubt the truth-revealing function of the press photographs. For Fontcuberta (2010: 12), photography can function as an orthopaedic mechanism of modern consciousness, since photography is a technology at the service of truth, evidence, an ethics of vision. The camera does not lie, but whoever operates the camera can lie or change what the camera reveals about reality. Due to digital technologies, distrust of human intervention in the mechanical reflection of reality is inevitable.

In *El beso de Judas: Fotografía y verdad*, Fontcuberta recognizes that photography is a fiction that presents itself as true and that today it no longer makes sense to argue about what is true and what is false, but to consider between good lying and bad lying. In today's digital era of photography, the literal and direct connections between photography (image) and reality (things) are compromised.

In the conference "The violence of images, violence against the image", Baudrillard (2008) alert that we are facing «predominantly the violence of information, the media, images, spectacle», i.e. «the violence linked to

transparency, to total visibility, to the disappearance of all secrecy». This is a new kind of violence and Baudrillard calls it “the virulence of images and information”. It is not just violent content, but the violence of the medium, the violence inflicted on “real” violence, even to the point of cancelling it out entirely, states Baudrillard. «When ‘the medium is the message’ (McLuhan), violence [as a medium] becomes its own message» and «violence at the level of image content doesn’t even bear comparison to the violence of the medium» as message, i.e. the violence ensuing from the confusion of medium and message (Baudrillard 2008).

Messages are transmitted through intense flows of information. Baudrillard (1997: 81) criticizes the excess of information and the scarcity of meaning in the media. For Baudrillard (1997: 82), «information devours its own content», i.e. «it devours communication and the social», because «rather than creating communication, it exhausts itself in the act of staging communication» and «rather than producing meaning, it exhausts itself in the staging of meaning». The importance of communication is excessive. Communication is more social than the social itself, as Baudrillard (1993: 12) states in *The transparency of evil*. He argues that the death of the social is, paradoxically, due to communication since it is essentially social.

As Baudrillard (1993: 153) states in *The transparency of evil*, «photography is our exorcism. Primitive society had its masks, bourgeois society its mirrors, and we have our images». Images fascinate. According to Manguel (2003: 109), regarding a recent commentary on the excess of violent images on television news, the American critic Geoffrey Hartman warns of the danger of being entertained with “useless violence” (“violencia inútil”). Images, their excess and hyper-realistic format make the masses acritical, as if images prevented us from thinking.

In *Simulacra e simulation*, Baudrillard emphasizes the consequences of images, arguing that reality has ceased to exist, as we now experience the representation of reality. Living in the representation is not live authentically. The media images provoke this transition from the lived to the non-lived, from reality to representation, as they disseminate representations increasingly distant from reality (their referents) by being and producing simulacra.

“Simulacra” are images without referents; signs that cannot be exchanged for reality. “Simulation” indicates the type of copy that is not only indistinguishable from what it copies, but in which the distinction between copy and original disappears. In the simulation, the notion of reality is lost, as an idea or situation is adopted as a supposed truth; there is no discernment for the distortion of reality.

The simulacra raise the falsehood or non-truth information, they adulterate the truth or paradoxically hides the inexistence of truth and doing this they are “truth” (Smith 2010: 196). The perception of reality and the idea that is formed about reality is triggered by signs (signifiers) that

produce impressions and effects of reality through their form (more than through their content). The referents of these signifiers do not exist; they are mirages, illusions, simulations. Therefore, the real is only the simulacrum of the symbolic, whose form is reduced and intercepted by the sign.

«This way the stake will always have been the murderous power of images, murderers of the real, murderers of their own model», says Baudrillard (1997: 6). «Whereas representation attempts to absorb simulation by interpreting it as a false representation, simulation envelops the whole edifice of representation itself as a simulacrum» (Baudrillard 1997: 7). In this precession of simulacra, there are successive phases of the image: i) it is the reflection of a profound reality; ii) it masks and denatures a profound reality; iii) it masks the absence of a profound reality; iv) it has no relation to any reality whatsoever; it is its own pure simulacrum (Baudrillard 1997: 7). First, “the image is a good appearance” (representation is of the sacramental order); second, “it is an evil appearance” (it is of the order of maleficence); third, “it plays at being an appearance” (it is of the order of sorcery); and fourth, “it is no longer of the order of appearances, but of simulation” (Baudrillard 1997: 7).

Baudrillard describes the “precession of simulacra” as the growing distancing of the image from reality. In this gradual process of the erasure of the reality of the image, reality disappears and the real is replaced by the hyperreal, the copy without original that is more real than reality.

Baudrillard denounces what he calls the «the murderous power of images», because images murder the real, which is their own model. The images represent the real and we settle for representations to the detriment of reality. We prefer representations, images, instead reality, which is a self-imposed violence, i.e. an imperceptible violence of the image (as a non-verbal language) that the individual exerts himself. The world has become representation; everything is sign.

For Baudrillard, the current media age is dominated by pure simulacra. The frequency with which the media disseminate images of spectacle, violence, tragedy, or suffering caused by warlike conflicts, provoking sensationalism and creating distance from reality, demonstrates how disconnected representations are. They create simulacra, a type of representation produced by simulation. The real and the hyperreal are two orders of simulacra generated by images through representation and, later, simulation (Baudrillard 1997: 18).

For Baudrillard (1997: 21), it is impossible to find an absolute level of real again, but it is also impossible to stage the illusion since «illusion is no longer possible, because the real is no longer possible».

With digital technologies, the connection between photography and reality has changed, it has become more flexible, volatile, closer to what Baudrillard calls simulation and further away from the realism inherent

to the traditional photography, i.e. the tendency to represent reality in its real aspect. The trans-substantiality of digital photography frees itself from memory and replaces the question of the representation of reality with the question of the construction of meaning (Fontcuberta 2010: 65).

The digital image no longer shares the essential functions of photography aimed at authenticating the experience. The digital photographs no longer authenticate the world; on the contrary, they produce and reproduce fictions that credulous, unwary, unconscious, or illiterate audiences take as authentic, as they are simulacra that build simulations, according to Baudrillard.

For Baudrillard, the simulacrum is a representation produced by simulation, a copy without an original. In a world where there are only simulations or where the form of the simulacrum predominates, the world is a copy of a copy and the very notions of authenticity and truth lose their point of reference. The concept of “simulacrum” is a problem for Baudrillard, but not in the sense of Plato, i.e. as a misleading imitation.

The problem of images for Plato is limited to the question of images being mere images of the truth. As Plato (2003, 509e-510a) points out in *The republic*, «in the category of the seen the first section is images, by which I mean in the first place shadows, and in the second place reflections in water, or any dense, smooth, shiny surface».

For Plato, any imitation is always negative because: a) it deviates from the truth; b) it appeals to emotions and emotions make us see things emotionally, leading us to immorality, instability, and irrationality. Images take us away from common sense and can be dangerous. In Plato's work, the question about the relation between *eidos* (real, truth), *ikon* (image), and *eidolon* (simulacrum) is relevant. According to *The Baudrillard dictionary* (Smith 2010: 102), the question is about the relation between the true model (and the model as truth) and the attempt to capture that model in a representation (*ikon*).

For Baudrillard, simulations are not like false images or obscure the truth through a device, a façade; «it is always a false problem to wish to restore the truth beneath the simulacrum» (Baudrillard 1997: 29). The problem concerning the image is that they are not representative, they do not “re-present” reality. It is the problem of conceiving and understanding the world as an image. To conceive and understand the world as an image means to impose a way of seeing the world, an ideological way, oriented to certain meanings that the images produce and indicate as convenient. For this reason, Baudrillard says that ideology only corresponds to a corruption of reality through signs and «simulation corresponds to a short circuit of reality and to its duplication through signs» (Baudrillard 1997: 29).

Regarding images in general (including media and technological images), Baudrillard highlights in *The evil demon of images* the perversity of the relationship between the image and its referent (reality), i.e. the virtual

and irreversible confusion the sphere of images and the sphere of reality, whose nature is less and less understandable. Baudrillard refers «the diabolical seduction of images» because images follow a strategy by which they always seem to refer to a real world and real objects, reproducing something that is, in a logical and chronological way, prior to own images (Baudrillard 1984: 13).

For Baudrillard, the images are diabolical because they seem to conform to reality. We naively believe in this conformity, in the realism of images. This is what happens with certain movies, which impress by the images that can detach us from the notion that they are enactments, representations, fictions. Baudrillard (1997: 60-61) presents the example of *Apocalypse now*, by Coppola. In movies with exaggerations, special and technological effects generated by a computer, the reality (if any) is the production and presentation of the movie itself, which is a simulation. It is a paradox: the represented (reality) comes from the representative (image) (Baudrillard 1984: 16).

The image contaminates and shapes reality (Baudrillard 1984: 16). It is as if the reality of something or situation is anticipated by the images of that thing or situation. Baudrillard invokes the problem of the image to warn about the primacy of the image as a simulacrum, over any putative reality. The image does not constitute the reality itself. The image is the representation of reality, it is the simulacrum. To simulate is to pretend an absent presence; it is to create an image without correspondence or representation with reality.

As Han (2017: 27) refers, «today, images are not just likenesses, but also models»; «we flee into images in order to be better, more beautiful, and more alive», which means that we are: a) producing more spectacle; b) increasingly familiar with the profusion of images (including shock images); c) to live according to these images, that is, imitating them. In his book intitle *In the swarm: Digital prospects*, Han states that «we are enlisting not only technology but images, too, in order to drive evolution forward», but «the digital medium is bringing about an iconic reversal that is making images seem more alive, more beautiful, and better than reality itself» (Han 2017: 27). The digital images create more distance to the real and «we are now producing images in enormous quantity by means of digital media» (Han 2017: 29). Han shares the same critical position as Baudrillard on images.

In *The intelligence of evil or the lucidity pact*, Baudrillard (2005: 93) recognizes this situation as a violence of the image, based on the hegemony and the omnipresence of the image (i.e. it is in the excess of the image, in the plethora of images), as well as on the content of the images (i.e. in what is done in the image, in what is shown through the image).

For Baudrillard (2005: 93), the image is an operator or the means of visibility, of an integral visibility/reality: the “becoming real” going hand in

hand with the “becoming visible” and everything must be seen, everything must be visible, and the image is eminently the space of this visibility.

The visual effects of the images are violent because they create illusions and “distort” reality. Images make reality disappear. The violent imperative of modern massification is that everything must be visible and be seen, and the image is the means par excellence for this absolute visibility. It is a dictatorship of the image. Paradoxically, the image makes everything visible and is the medium responsible for the disappearance of reality.

It is in this perspective that Baudrillard identifies the avid and collective search for new forms of expression, such as images are today, with the culmination, end or death of the social (the social void) and, in contrast, the apogee of the masses, which just want spectacle and this is provided by the images. Baudrillard refers to an apocalypse of the image. In modern societies, where simulation is the central element for Baudrillard, the media are responsible for the unbridled production of signs (images) that no longer have a relationship with reality; the media create something else, another reality or, at least, a reality of another nature. What is understood as hyperreal image is produced with the intention of being more real than reality itself, which is no longer so. Baudrillard demonstrates that reality is supplanted or hidden by the imitation of the image, which is always new and more complete, and therefore more interesting and captivating for popular and visual culture.

For example, images of war are like another event derived from the real event, which is the war. As an event, war images have to do with the impact that the media images provoke intentionally or not by reporting the war and by transforming it into the news, i.e. in another event turned into a spectacle and symbolically violent. War images and news are the result of the status of war and violence as news value. Any event or situation of violence can be raised to news visibility since violence is an example of news value. War is an extraordinary event in the sense of breaking the order of collective life. War is strongly characterized by actions of excessive and extreme violence. War events generically correspond to the criteria of newsworthiness and the attention of the news media and public opinion who “consume” images of war as images of the spectacle.

In *Regarding the pain of others*, Sontag (2003: 4) questions the ability of the photography of war to communicate, signify, or sensitize something substantial. This question is important to understand the role of the news images as an ethical and practical activity to fulfil social functions like to inform us about what happens in the world. Baudrillard questions whether photographs in the news media could really show us the war. According to Baudrillard, images of war in the news media are the hyper-visualization of the war. In *Simulacra and simulation*, Baudrillard (1997: 28) states that it is «a sort of frisson of the real, or of an aesthetics of the hyperreal, a frisson

of vertiginous and phony exactitude, a frisson of simultaneous distancing and magnification, of distortion of scale, of an excessive transparency». Images of war are not different from war, but «they are not (or not any longer): to the routinized violence of war is added the equally routine violence of the images», states Baudrillard (2005: 77) in *The intelligence of evil or the lucidity pact*.

3. Conclusions

Any image shows something, transmits some information and, thus, influences and persuades about what it shows. Generically, if any image influences, images of violence influence more. When broadcast by the news media or repeatedly shared on social networks, images of violence have even more effects on a larger number of people.

The news media provoke effects. Through the transmitted content (e.g. TV programs showing violence) and the way they are transmitted (e.g. with more emphasis, spectacle, repetition, and sensationalism), the influence of the media increases. The messages change when they are transmitted by different media, becoming more spectacular, in a way to be more attractive and seduce more the target audiences. As McLuhan (1967: 8) says, the media elicit effects from the content transmitted and the ways in which they operate. When a message or information is encoded, it is no longer the same, as it undergoes a modification process caused precisely by the means that provide for its enjoyment.

Media images are technical prostheses. The profusion or trivialization of images of violence in current visual cultures, where anyone can produce and easily disseminate them on the internet on a global scale, paradoxically reveals the crisis of images at a time when they proliferate and are the object of iconophilia. Crisis of images in several aspects: as a crisis of representation and of the regimes of visibility and truth (it is also an ethical crisis of the image-simulacrum), crisis of images that creates an erosion of meaning, as Baudrillard warns, and failure to fulfil the informative and referential functions, crisis of images with the secularization of the world and cultural sterilization, given the technological advances and the emergence of programs for easy digitalization and image editing. The crises of representation and truth intensified throughout the 1990s, according to Rouillé (2009: 155), reaching the foundations of the image-document not adapted to the reality of the current information society. The crisis of representation corresponds to what Virilio (1991: 112) calls the crisis caused by modern media technology, diluting differences, or not allowing to distinguish what is real and true from what is fictitious. In Baudrillard's perspective, the contradiction between reality and the imaginary disappears. Unreality corresponds to the resemblance of reality to itself, i.e. to the

absurd identification of reality which is its own representation. This is the crisis of representation. For Baudrillard, the reality is «that of which it is possible to provide an equivalent reproduction» (Baudrillard 2000: 73). The real is situated in a reproducible process; it is what can be reproduced and what is always already reproduced.

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