RESEARCH

AFTER THE PERFECT CRIME: THE FUTURE OF CULTURE IN THE ERA OF SIMULACRA

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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the ideas around the concepts of culture, simulacrum and hyperreality developed by philosopher Jean Baudrillard throughout his career and, in particular, in his book *The Perfect Crime*. The lines that follow examine the validity of his thoughts at the moment, especially in regard to the relationship between different cultural events with the capital concept of simulacrum proposed by the French. A link in which the image, being both a product and mediation, plays a key role in shaping the systemic order.

KEY WORDS

Jean Baudrillard- simulacrum- hyperreality- culture.

DESPUÉS DEL CRIMEN PERFECTO: EL FUTURO DE LA CULTURA EN LA ERA DEL SIMULACRO

RESUMEN

El presente trabajo repasa las ideas expuestas en torno a los conceptos de cultura, simulacro e hiperrealidad desarrolladas por el filósofo Jean Baudrillard a lo largo de su carrera y, en particular, en su libro *El crimen perfecto*. Las líneas que siguen examinan la vigencia de sus reflexiones en el momento actual, sobre todo en lo que respecta a la relación entre las diferentes manifestaciones culturales con el concepto capital de simulacro propuesto por el francés. Un vínculo en el que la imagen, en tanto que producto y también mediación, juega un papel primordial en la configuración del orden sistémico.

PALABRAS CLAVE:

Jean Baudrillard – simulacro – hiperrealidad - cultura.

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"Why does it not have to be as many real worlds as imaginary worlds? Why a single real world, why such an exception?" (Baudrillard, 1995, p. 89).

DEPOIS DO CRIME PERFEITO: O FUTURO DA CULTURA NA ERA DO SIMULACRO

RESUMO

O presente trabalho repassa as idéias expostas em torno aos conceitos de cultura, simulação e hiper-realidade desenvolvidas pelo filósofo Jean Baudrillard ao largo da sua carreira e, em particular, no seu livro O crime perfeito. As linhas que seguem examinam a vigência de suas reflexões no momento atual, principalmente o que diz respeito à relação entre as diferentes manifestações culturais com o conceito capital de simulacro proposto pelo francês. Um vínculo em que a imagem, como produto e também mediação, joga um papel primordial na configuração da ordem sistêmica.

PALAVRAS CHAVE

Jean Baudrillard - Simulacro - Hiper-realidade - Cultura

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1. INTRODUCTION

In 1995, Jean Baudrillard published *The Perfect Crime*, ultimately one of the fundamental works of his bibliography. Fundamental because it could be regarded as a synthesis and the nth power of the idea of greater depth and persistence of the philosopher. Hyperreality and simulacrum were two concepts that were already intuited even in his second book, *The Consumer Society* (1970), still unnamed but already present on an even aware statistical and formally still moderate analysis, but with vanishing points to a rabid view of reality that would be consolidated in subsequent publications. Baudrillard's speech was already formed in its guidelines, for example, in *Culture and Simulacrum* (1981)[2], but it still remained far from the radical and abrupt style, writing on a stroke of the pen and instinct that characterize *The Perfect Crime*. And it is largely the concurrence of these stylistic traces in writing with the clairvoyance of the exhibition that it favors what makes the latter a capital book in Baudrillard's thinking. In it, his speech renews its commitment to postmodern dismantling of reality, but it also redefines the farce in terms of a

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[2] From which I take the original edition in French published in 1981 as reference: BAUDRILLARD, Jean (1981). *Simulacres et simulations.* Paris: Editions Galilée

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metaphor that could be definitive for understanding: the perfect crime is that of virtuality that has replaced that reality we thought to be set in stone as an unattainable mirage. And while checking whether that this mirage melts before our eyes is unattainable, our eyes have come to accept without suspicion. There never was this reality, but the simulacrum has made its existence transparent, crystalline to us, so that we do not doubt. Because its existence, in fact, depends on our belief, without which it would be essentially impossible. Baudrillard explained it well with a gag starring Harpo Marx in *A Night in Casablanca*, Archie L. Mayo, 1946:

In a film of the Marx Brothers, Harpo stays stuck to a wall. "What are you doing there?". "I'm holding the wall." "You mock me! Get out!". Harpo takes a step to the side and the wall collapses. Are we all not stuck to the wall, and is that wall not the wall of Reality? It would suffice that only one left for the wall to collapse, burying the millions of people occupying the abandoned barracks (Baudrillard, 1995: 46).

Reviewing the scene, it would be necessary to make a couple of clarifications, as Harpo does not speak –he never did it, at least in the cinema- and his interlocutor, a cop prowling the streets of Casablanca, is the one who forces him away from the wall. However, these nuances have little importance to what Baudrillard tries to tell us. The sequence serves as a perfect illustration of this central thesis in *The Perfect Crime*, and incidentally it reminds the primordial role of the image[3] at the time of transmitting it, for the same thesis is not understood without the endless profusion of images that has served to create the illusion of reality. The relationship between image and theory is intrinsic and, therefore, the perfect crime alluded to by the philosopher is such because of the perfection of the image that conceals it.

Once this point is reached, the reader will not be surprised by the warning that the intentions of this text are not to refute the ideas presented in *The Perfect Crime*. Partly because I am in tune with them and partly because they have shown a visionary quality that seems endless despite the passing years, and therefore it would be useless to contradict the view of the configuration of today's world. In that sense, the predictions of the philosopher practically left a road on which we still travel today written almost to the end. Suffice it to resort, in order to check it, to the last stage of his bibliography, to titles like *The Impossible Exchange* (2002), in which his usual theoretical line on topics such as digital technology is applied. However, what this essay does propose is to confirm specific incidents of simulacrum in the medial and artistic processes that define the life of anyone integrated into the consumer society, in the giddy logic of capitalism and the not less vertiginous transformations it promotes in its environment. It is not that Baudrillard in his work dispenses with concrete examples to illustrate his words. We have already mentioned his allusion to a film of the Marx Brothers and it is not an isolated case, as throughout his various essays he invokes other titles like *Indecent Proposal*, Adrian Lyne, 1993, *Dead Ringers*, David Cronenberg, 1988 and *Cronenberg*, 1995 and the novel by JG Ballard adapting the latter -to which he dedicates an entire chapter in his *Culture and Simulacrum*- or media events such as the death of Diane of Wales, intending to crown his views

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[3] I will take the image in its meaning linked to a technical reproduction, as it is the one that best fits a commentary to the work of Baudrillard. However, we must point out that researchers such as Malena Segura Contrera currently work in an archeology of the image that tries to undo this automatic conceptual link with the technical medium which, as sons of modernity, we can barely avoid.

about the inability to force the value -and the commercial exchange- of what we cannot own -ourselves-, the fascination for the double, synchrony between death, sex and simulation, or the desire of the media event as an eventual exorcism of fear of excess meaning.

2. OBJECTIVES

In the following lines, however, the study will focus on the image and the effects of its multiplications and transformations as pillar elements in the articulation of the era of hyperreality. But also, and perhaps more importantly, I will discuss the consequences that changes in their technical reproducibility conditions have brought about in an inescapably and mutant capitalist context. Transformations undoubtedly taking as a reference point the loss of aura in the artwork preached by Walter Benjamin in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, but also their reflection on the agents involved in that ever faster changing scenario of consumption of images: "the orientation of reality to the masses and the masses towards it is a process with an unlimited scope both for thinking and for looking" (Benjamin, 2003: 48). In this context, enclose the current nature of the image and its impact is perhaps the only way to know whether we are closer or further away from that total transparency about which Baudrillard spoke. To glimpse the future, always uncertain, out of the deep indeterminacy of our present.

3.DISSCUSION
3.1 From the spectacle to simulacrum

We have discussed above the style of *The Perfect Crime*, its almost abrupt and seemingly instinctive writing despite the profound reflections that it promotes. In this regard, it would not be far away from another fundamental text in the thinking of the twentieth century: *The Society of The Spectacle* (1967) by situationist Guy Debord, with which it is also related by an interesting relationship of continuity in diagnosis of the world. Debord wrote his book based on more or less convincing aphorisms, perhaps aware of the amplifying impact it would have on his speech. But what is truly fascinating is to see today how his ideas already marked the beginning of a path that would be followed years later by Baudrillard. *The Society of The Spectacle* by the former is the stage that precedes the simulacrum era of the latter. Baudrillard himself confirms that bond when, in *The Perfect Crime.* He states that "virtuality is not like the spectacle, still leaving room for critical conscience and disappointment. The abstraction of the spectacle, even to the Situationists, was never final, while the unconditional realization is so, because we are no longer alienated and dispossessed, we have all the information "(Baudrillard, 1995, p. 30). Of course, the relationship is not an analogy, because while the spectacle describes a cluster of relationships between a system -capitalism- and the individual -consumer / producer-, the simulacrum has already incorporated the individual as a conscious actor, so the duality it is no longer possible, neither is valid the communication scheme for a mass society. However, it they are added the fact that mediation of the image is revealed indispensable to deconstruct the systemic principle that generates it in each case. In fact, it is crystallized into concrete ways of representation: in *The*

Society of The Spectacle, the audiovisual image is referenced as an articulator of the capitalist order, either through television -which is explicitly mentioned in the text as one of the spectacular apparatuses- or film - the reference of which is rather implicit-. It is not a coincidence that one of the most repeated images on the covers of various editions of the book of Debord is precisely the photography of J.R. Eyerman for *Life* magazine, one in which we see a group of spectators attending the first screening of a 3D film, Bwana Devil (Arch Oboler, 1952). There is an ironic component in it, for the photograph of a group of people with 3D glasses in the cinema might not be so much an image as a reference to the spectacle as one already hinted at by the simulacrum. The film, in its traditional conception of collective action such as the Lumière brothers thought it, was to Debord a spectacular means that was a player and disseminator of an alleged speech of the real environment. The film image, therefore, would be to the consumer the illusion of reality on a screen, which could project their dreams and desires, but nothing more. At the time the viewer puts on the 3D glasses, they are accessing –thinking they access- a greater degree of reality. There is a fantasy of breaking the communicative limits of cinematic spectacle and insight into this, which results in a relief image that is the illusion of immersion and participation. But in reality, not even the 3D cinema of the 1950s could consummate this full participation of the spectator in the spectacle, neither could the film in general be the spectacular medium par excellence, because this should be associated with isolation to form the *lonely crowds* (Debord, 1995: 11), and which takes place more evidently and intensely in the case of television. The cinema, however, could be a tool of indoctrination -the propaganda cinema, any fiction or nonfiction film in collusion with the political and / or economic power, but due to its playing conditions still leaves room for dialogue and social exchange , to a sphere of socialization in which discussion and criticism are possible. With television, the spectacular system was a step forward towards the isolation of the individual. With the cinema, there was still a loophole for reaction, a loophole that should be removed. This is what simulacrum has made by multiplying the screens and the hyper-profusion of the image: the socializing possibility has been eliminated in the expansion ad infinitum of a series of mobile devices that customize the playback conditions to suit the user. The communicative process of the film medium is thus entirely transformed, as it no longer depends on a specific context nor is it subject to the rules of the unidirectional message –the impossibility of the receiver to pause and resume the movie as they want-. With the film contained in a portable stand, the *spectator* becomes a *user* with full capacity of decision and control over what they see. Now they are the owners of the story and can consume it how and when they please. As for the communal act inherent to cinema in its traditional form of reception, this cannot be completely eradicated, at least not yet. However, it can be relocated, reconverted according to the interests of the era of the simulacrum. Earlier, the palace cinemas gathered more than a thousand people in front of a single (and huge) screen. Releases enjoyed the quality of a great event, an unrepeatable event that could even swirl the star system for the occasion. The evolution of television would force, over the years, to a readaptation to more modest movie theaters. Yet, well into the 1990s, a spectator could choose, in a city like Valencia, from a dozen of movie theaters located in town: still the cinema experience continued being possible without its being contingent on other continent, on another kind of experience. Obviously, this changed with the

arrival of the multiplex and their integration into shopping centers. Suddenly, cinemas were driven out of towns and villages, relocated into complexes of varied heights and dimensions in which they shared the space with all kinds of shops and leisure activities. This way, the cinema stopped being an experience that made its spectators roam, the ancient movie theaters of the urban area closed and new multiplexes, owned by multinationals and Hollywood majors, became another supplement to families and couples shipped into intense days of giddy consumerism in the suburbs. It was -and it has been until today- another part in what Baudrillard came to define as "the model for any future form of socialization controlled in a homogeneous space -homogeneous time of the body and life (work, leisure, food, hygiene, transportation, media, culture)."[4]

3.2 The status of the image or the progressive dilution of the reference

In this context, what value can remain in the picture? Not only has it devalued the experience of going to the movies: the same audiovisual image has lost its value as speech in favor of profusion and dispersal. It is no longer the center of a ceremony that was much religious, and of course it has long since lost the aura of Benjamin. Its hierarchy having being destroyed, the image is no longer unique to be multiple, it is no longer sacred to be rhizomatic, it is no longer (supposedly) the reflection of reality but only a reflection of reality that validates itself. Any ceremony around it conferring on it a certain mythical aura has been removed, so it now only lives on appearances, an ordinary mask can barely conceal the emptiness behind. Let us recall the successive phases of the image to Baudrillard:
- The image as a reflection of a profound reality.
- The image masks and denatures a profound reality.
- The image masks the absence of profound reality.
- The image with no relation to any reality, as its own pure simulacrum.

In the first case it is a good appearance and its representation belongs to the order of the sacrament. In the second, it is a bad appearance and is equal to the order of hex. In the third, it plays to be an appearance and it would fall into the order of the spell. Finally, in the fourth, it no longer belongs to the order of appearance, but to the simulation[5]. Indeed, in passing from spectacle to simulacrum, the image has lost its

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[4] «L'hypermarché est déjà, au-delà de l'usine et des institutions traditionnelles du capital, le modèle de toute forme future de socialisation contrôlée : retotalisation en un espace-temps homogène de toutes les fonctions dispersées du corps et de la vie sociale (travail, loisir, nourriture, hygiène, transports, media, culture)» / «Hypermarket already is, in addition to the factory and the traditional institutions of capital, the model of any future form of socialization controlled in homogeneous space-time of the body and life (work, leisure, food, hygiene, transportation, media, culture)» (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 115).
[5] Telles seraient les phases successives de l'image:
- elle est le reflet d'une réalité profonde
- elle masque et dénature une réalité profonde
- elle masque l'*absence* de réalité profonde
- elle est sans rapport à quelque réalité que ce soit : elle est son propre simulacre pur.Dans le premier cas, l'image est une *bonne* apparence – la représentation est de l'ordre du sacrement. Dans le second, elle est une *mauvaise* apparence – de l'ordre du maléfice. Dans le troisième, elle *joue à être* une

solid appearance of reality and it has become detached from that direct relationship. In fact, it has lost its reference to constitute itself as its own reference in a simulated autonomy that is a symptom of virtuality in which the world is engulfed. After the attack on the Twin Towers on Sept. 11, 2001, they issued some TV news images that presented the inhabitants of an Islamic town supposedly celebrating the success of the terrorist act. It was not long before it was discovered that it was archival footage that had nothing to do with the attack on the World Trade Center. The overlapping sense speaks of the mistiness of images already broken off from their referent: these can mean whatever we want and when we want, because behind them there is only emptiness. There is no longer the imperative of the original meaning, since the context is highly malleable at the expense of personal interest. It is curious that Debord fought against the tyranny of fixed sense of the univocal sign, a battle that today would be useless. To him, a critique of the spectacular system was only pronounced globally and against all aspects of alienated social life (Debord, 1995: 49). It is conceivable that within those aspects, the image was provided to branch the ideology of the spectacle, so the only way to combat this servitude was precisely by breaking the language with its referents of reality. In 1951, Debord had attended the Cannes Film Festival and was shown the possibilities of the medium in the projection of *Traité de bave et d'éternité* (1951), Isidore Isou. A few years later, he would make *La société du spectacle* (1973), a feature film bearing the title of his most important work and taking the concept of diversion[6] as a principle, forged on the screen by reusing existing images taken from their context –the film included archival footage of George Harrison, Johnny Hallyday, Adolf Hitler, Henry Kissinger or Fidel Castro, among others-, and thus stripped them of their status of quotation. At present, the undertaking of Debord would be of little use, since the image has lost its referent and survives only in its own simulacrum: there is no longer room there for the real. In this respect, the most convincing statement was signed by Baudrillard in *The Perfect Crime*:

> "The image can no longer imagine the real, since it herself is so. It can no longer dream of it, since it is its virtual reality. It is like if things had swallowed their mirror and had become transparent to themselves, entirely present for themselves, in broad daylight, in real time, in a ruthless transcription. Instead of being absent from themselves in the illusion, they are forced to join thousands of screens from whose horizon not only the real, but also the image have disappeared. Reality has been expelled from reality" (Baudrillard, 1995: 11)

Here we could invoke the dimension of the image being sign and part of language : the loss of strength of the sign is the indicator of the increasing volatility of language. In *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, Italo Calvino claimed to have the impression of witnessing an epidemic that was sweeping humans in what most characterized them:

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apparence – elle est de l'ordre du sortilège. Dans le quatrième, elle n'est plus du tout de l'ordre de l'apparence, mais de la simulation (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 17).

[6] The origin of the concept of *diversion* (*détournement*) dates back to the years of Debord at the International Lyricist. In number 8 of *Les Lèvres Nues*, published in May 1956, Debord and Gil J. Wolman signed - Mode d'emploi du détournement -, in which they detailed what the use of said concept consisted of (Debord and Wolman, 1956).

the use of the word. The Italian writer and journalist branded it as "a plague of language that manifests itself as loss of cognitive power and immediacy, as automatism that tends to level expression in its most generic, anonymous, abstract shapes, to dilute meanings, to iron out the expressive ends "(Calvino 1995: 72). Something very similar happens with the image, filed from meaning and converted into annulled sigh in the generic. However, yes there is still the possibility of rupture, deception and sham violation of that virtuality. It exists, at least to some extent, intrinsically in some images. In *I'm Dreaming of A Black Christmas* (1971), the British pop artist Richard Hamilton took one frame of the film *White Christmas* (Michael Curtiz, 1954) and turned it into a negative image. The result was clear ideological implications: its star Bing Crosby, a figure associated with a conservative Christian family tradition would see his skin color inverted to black. The oil painting thus becomes uncomfortable racial equalization, eternal comment of the original image and the values inherent in the character. As much as this is the subject of thousands of reproductions and copies, in theory all should be forced to talk again to their original reference. Leaving aside the ideological aspect, recontextualization by the technique is also paramount in another work of Hamilton, *Trafalgar Square*. In this case, the intention rests on artistic innovation: a photograph of the famous London square, a zoom applied on a portion of the image to distort the figures that inhabit it and the painting the image reinvents on this blurred portion of reality -or rather, its reproduction-. The result would lose any connection to the original context if it were not because Hamilton chooses to keep the reference in the title of the work. We do not see it is Trafalgar Square, but we know that is Trafalgar Square because the artist forces us, from the paratext, to observe the same place from another point of view: What better way to regain a reality that would otherwise be vulgar to us? Both works of Hamilton offer high resistance to erosion of transparency of the simulacrum, and they are still somewhat likely to be absorbed by it. Crosby may be a reference diluted in future generations of consumers of images, and the pictorial reworking on part of Trafalgar Square can be multiplied merely as an abstraction. The only attribute that can definitely release them is their commodification, an awareness of object-merchandise found in Andy Warhol. To the French, all in Warhol is fictitious, "the object is fictitious because it has no relation to the subject, but to the mere desire for objects" (Baudrillard, 1995, p. 73). Being detached from its natural significance, and it is already object-fetish and therefore artifice. Like the works of Hamilton, the original imaginary of the image is deleted, except that here it does so to give the value of the goods. Thus, the Warholian commodity-image is understood only by being stripped of transcendent desire and aesthetics, its essence is pure immanence, surface value and the absolute time of consumerist desire. Baudrillard aligns that intention with the radicalization of art proposed by Charles Baudelaire, who wanted to turn it into absolute commodity. Only then the image can escape the beautification of the image, a process that goes right to the simulacrum, or the sentimental and bourgeois expression of advertising[7]. That is, Baudelaire defends an *absolute objectification* that

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[7]Baudrillard develops this linkage between Warhol and Baudelaire in his conferences at the Documentary Center of Mendoza Hall during his stay in Caracas in 1994. They have been collected in *The Plot of Art: Aesthetic Illusion and Disillusion* (Baudrillard, 2006).

Baudrillard would translate into art abounding "in the sense of formal and fetishized abstraction of the commodity, a sort of fairy value of change and becomes more merchandise than merchandise itself for it is farther regarding the value of change and escape from it by radicalizing it" (Baudrillard, 2006: 21). To do this, Warhol's art is based on the need to become an absolute machine, to point to "mechanical autoplay of already mechanical, already manufactured objects, whether a can of soup or the face of a star '(Baudrillard, 2006, p. 22).

3.3 A new religion

Thus, only (a part of) the pop art in its rebellion and consciousness could survive the progressive dissolution of the referent in the hands of the simulacrum, and almost nothing survives the expulsion of the artistic text of the speech center. However, although the simulacrum is based on profusion and promiscuous reproduction, it still needs a structuring discourse that can preserve the status quo of things. The evolution towards full transparency is not sustainable without a hierarchy of reality, without an equivalent to the religious order that prevailed in the spectacle. When the simulacrum already caresses its full perfection, in which it is not to find any impurities or resistance, it requires an alternative to keep intact its mirage. The image and the instrumentalization of sense being displaced to a second or even third level, it is the support that comes to occupy the center stage. It is a very astute decision, because while the images escaped its complete control, the support sticks to its domain without loopholes. Thus, the pornographic and already emptied profusion or the profusion of a manipulable sense of the images can continue, since they are devices that favor the real star. The latest technological innovations in next-generation mobile phones, tablets and laptops already captured the attention to the detriment of the image as text, so its character of cultural mediation was no longer important, neither does it serve as a catalyst for reflection. It is the technology that has taken the place of fetish / merchandise, and image can do little against that. In this new context, it is bound to fade in multitasking, to settle for being a mere icon in an endless list of possibilities making it possible to organize our needs for evasion, to consume, to organize our labor affairs, to manage our lifetime [8]. All our vital functions and responses to our desires elegantly compressed into a small support we can hold in our hands, a small-scale version –though, paradoxically, with less reduced choices thanks to the unlimited digital environment- of shopping centers as models of control over the means of production and socialization. All life available on a touch screen, only that the individual has forgotten because it is not about life

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[8] At this point, we must remember the arguments of Baudrillard in *The Society of Consumption* about the value of time in capitalism: "…we are faced with a logical impossibility of *free* time, there can only be obligated time. Time for consumption is that of production. It is so to the extent that it is never more than an *evasive* parenthesis in the cycle of production (…) Leisure is constrained as long as, behind its apparently being free of charge, it reproduces all mental and practical restrictions proper to production time and subdued everydayness (…) the totality and spontaneity that want to take us back to leisure, as they occur at a social time essentially marked by modern division of work, acquire the objective form of evasion and *irresponsibility*. So far so good, that irresponsibility of leisure is homologous and structurally complementary to irresponsibility at work. *Liberty* on the one hand and obligation on the other hand: the structure is the same" (Baudrillard, 2009, p. 193).

but about its impeccable simulation. Thus the passing of modern technologies as *extensions of man*, as Marshall McLuhan understood them, to modern technologies such as *expulsions of man*, as claimed by Baudrillard (Baudrillard, 1995. p. 38) is carried out.

That rise of the technological from *mediation* to *end* has occurred partly thanks to an impressive strategy of self-legitimation. In the competition among the most powerful technology companies in the market, a kind of differentiation resembling a new faith as a sophisticated club that is identified as the elite in these products succeeds. Its message seems to say: "my product is better than that of my competitor and therefore you must pay a higher price, but in return you will receive the guarantee that you will not find any problems and may enter our exclusive club, the only one that cares for its people and caters perfectly to their needs." And this is articulated through a pristine brand image identified in the purity of white tones and simplicity of their icons, which are the unifying links for devotees of this new creed. They work the same way as the iconography of religion, and they even come with the exaltation of their creative figure, sanctified as a genius inventor and benefactor of mankind. On the other hand, the results of indoctrination are amazing and have replicas of the most radical expressions of some of the *official* religions: the user will wait in long lines and even ask the day off in their work to have the possibility, before anyone, of being in possession of the latest version of a mobile phone or tablet that goes on sale, to an increasing price will come when the user has just finished paying the installments of their previous version. Also, they user will speak angrily to anyone who dares to question the logic of this technological religion and will soon resort, often vehemently, to the argument of the quality of products and the unquestionable superiority over those of the competition. Thus there is a form of fundamentalism without violence that is the best tool to ensure continuity and growth of the blind and consumerist faith. Success lies in the degree of conviction and belief breathed into followers, who will be the best carriers of official discourse that holds another victory of the simulacrum. But there is still room for further success, which is already reaching and shall be treated as the ineluctable transparency of the simulacrum: a stage in which the consumer is even aware of that wild business logic of products born with their expiration date already scheduled, yet they continue to embrace their consumerist faith. That is, that the individual is no longer the only actor in the performance, but also already knows the conditions under which he carries them out. The degree of refinement in the concept of simulation is amazing, because that individual has agreed to a new phase in which, knowing the logic of the system in which he participates, he could turn against it, but the individual rather accepts it and continues feeding it. Issues such as functionality, innovation or promises of improvement are no longer important, because the prevailing promise is that of the technological fetish ascribed to the reigns of brevity, the evanescence preceding its update. There is no possibility of rebellion, because the degree of transparency is such that the buyer agrees to purchase something that has its obsolescence guaranteed. When he has agreed to remain a member of that club, even knowing that piece of information, nothing remains to be done, because he has committed the pursuit of happiness (consumer) to the eternally dissatisfied reign of expectation. And that self-consciousness is what marks the latest triumph of the simulacrum in its most perfect form: one in which the individual knows he is subdued by a pernicious

system for their interests, but accepts in exchange for a concretized pursuit of happiness that will never culminate. It is also the triumph of the consumer society. In the episode *Commissions and Fees* (# 12x05, Christopher Manley: 2012) of the series *Mad Men* (Matthew Weiner, AMC: 2007-2015), the protagonist Don Draper (Jon Hamm) was responsible for putting it into words: "Happiness is a moment before you need more happiness." Just replace the word *happiness* with any of these multi-functional, unwanted , obsolete and quickly ephemeral objects.

3.4 The disappearance of art

That rise and exaltation of the technological fetish has replaced the need for a text, has driven out the content of the continent. Therefore, culture in its diverse artistic facets is no longer relevant: it is more powerful than ever, in a myriad of options, but is defunct under the speed and ephemeral nature of the *real* -or rather, the *virtuality* of the real-. Everything is subordinate to the evangelical faith in the evangelical-technological doctrine. There is nothing that does not pass through the filter of the virtual, the fading reflex. Today, the religious-technological discourse has the power once enjoyed by the political or Catholic discourse, which have lost ground. In this new paradigm, most baffling paradoxes affecting different artistic expressions occur. For example, after more than a century of transformations, the cinema returns to its original stage, coined by Tom Gunning as cinema of attractions. It is no longer the communal act devised by the Lumière brothers to return to being an individual act as devised by Edison. That is, the collective idea of the cinema is replaced by the cinema as temporary evasion in the barracks of a fair in the late nineteenth century. The difference is that it is no longer confined to display this context of exhibition, it can be consumed anywhere and under any conditions. In this context, the mobile device now replaces the zoetrope or Kinetoscope of yore. The fascination with technology is again the rationale of the invention, and not the expressive possibilities arising from it. Proof that image is no longer relevant is the high definition, which applies a tabula rasa: the image will only be valuable because of its quality, and here it would be relevant to recall Baudrillard's maximum that says that "the highest definition of the medium corresponds to the lowest definition of message "(Baudrillard, 1995: 32) And what it is the yardstick for measuring that quality? That image is as close as possible to what we mean as *reality*, that its digital texture deploys the most faithful reproductions of the world we perceive and where we live in our everyday experiences. Artistic intentions do not matter in the use of color that originally defined the work itself, as well as the choice of playback format or material in which it was filmed. Its ultimate destination is the HD plasma screen that will file down these impurities and become the expression of hyperreality: "Nothing to do with the representation, and even less with the aesthetic illusion. Any generic illusion of the image is annihilated by the technical perfection "(Baudrillard, 1995, p. 33). This identification of the *real* in the purity of the pixel tissue could lead to the hypothetical case of a spectator on his couch looking at the screen displaying a fiction in which a spectator is shown on the sofa watching TV. If the image has lost all its aesthetic values in favor of the closest definition to the human eye, does would that TV viewers no longer be seeing his own reflection? The screen turned into a mirror, a definitive victory of the simulacrum. The most obvious proof is in the success of

countless programs of *reality show* that replicate the Big Brother model (John de Mol, Veronica: 1999-): exorbitant audiences for a simulacrum of everyday life or its dramatized version, often indistinguishable from one another. The viewer feels both fascinated on the couch to watch the spectacularized conflicts among participants, featured as great moments in the program -the highlighted show- that uses direct broadcast for 24 hours by cameras that are inside the house / set. In the first case, the viewer is witnessing an increased reflection, distorted by banal dramatization. In the second, he is facing his own reflection, banal but not dramatic, in theory without any mediation. The problem is also that the viewer can no longer be sure whether the image is still that mediated character, whether its very nature has already not been absorbed and with him the perverse Orwellian logic behind the title. In a scene from *The Truman Show* (Peter Weir, 1998), the protagonist played by Jim Carrey is situated in front of the bathroom mirror and stares at it. On the other side, there are the spectators in their daily lives with the character not being –apparently- aware of it. However, in previous sequences, the character has been about to find out that its population, Seaheaven, is nothing more than a gigantic TV studio and his life is the focus of a *reality show* of huge success worldwide. For this reason, when the described scene arrives, the viewer of the film is in doubt whether or not Truman knows what is really going on. His gaze lost in the mirror for several seconds warns two technicians of the program, who come to think that he has actually discovered the truth. Then, however, Truman begins to play with the bar of soap on the mirror and to imitate an astronaut, making the technicians calm again. Then Truman erases the drawing made with a towel, winks at the camera / mirror and says, "That one's for free". Although apparently it does not have a significant impact on the story, the sequence suggests a double game that remarkably resembles the situation we live in the simulacrum: we are all actors and spectators at the flawless simulation of the world, and we cannot even be sure about the image that gives us the mirror.

And what about photography or painting? Of course, they already broke away from their contexts and production conditions. They are images without aura, without history or future other than remaining in infinite copies that do not necessarily respect the format or color. They all are images floating in image banks, without an exhibition space that contextualizes them. Of course, we can find the Wikipedia point, the surrounding encyclopedic information. But we will not even be certain that the information is reliable, because the simulacrum has allowed any of its actors to be trained to provide it to the rest. As Harold Bloom says, "on the Internet there is all knowledge, but there is lack of wisdom" (Bloom, 2002, p. 13). There, the images teem at a frantic rate, as if it were about jumbled digital particles. The aesthetic value, hierarchy and order of artistic gestures are already restricted to the museum space, which essentially stops being a space of cultural dissemination to be of cultural elitism. Meanwhile, the network hosts the latest manifestation of a hollowed image that craves to regain its identity: the *selfie*. Thousands, millions of anonymous people who daily repeat self-photos taken with their mobile in relation to different contexts. Implicit in this fashion, there is a need to remain visible, to continue noting that we *exist* in the infinite virtuality of the world. So the context is only important to the extent that the selfie relates its protagonist to it, while it explicitly states that there exists a relationship with the real. Unlike the members of some ancient societies that prevented themselves from being photographed for fear of losing their soul, the selfie

insists on recovering it by way of insistence and profusion. It's like in the episode *The Time of Angels* (# 04x05, Adam Smith, 2010) in *Doctor Who* (Sydney Newman, CE Webber and Donald Wilson, BBC: 2005-): at a given moment, the Doctor (Matt Smith) and his fellow adventurers discover that the weeping angels who threaten their lives in a giant maze have lost their image and, with it, their strength, their vitality. The image is no longer the supplement but the guarantee of identity. The selfie is therefore a race against dilution of the self exerted by the simulacrum, and also its own reassurance. It is a pathology that arises consequently from the simulated reality and reproduces identical photographs relative to each other, for the sole purpose of recording the passage of time and committing ourselves to witness our presence in the here and now. And again, we have at our disposal the tools reaffirming self-sufficiency of the substitute act of the experience: the extendable arms that allow us to take the picture framed in the environment, without the need for someone else to participate. Only we in relation to a context and a time that disappear immediately. The photo replaced with the act of the photo. The participation of the photographer unaware of our individuality, removed from the equation.

The music too is separated into an increasingly virtual degree of its first performance, since even a live concert is no longer a guarantee of reality: the recording industries are the ones that decide how far the dictatorship of the playback reaches, plus who can access it and how to appeal to their audience. Everything is measured, planned, from the choreography to the type of sound, everything planned within an increasingly breakneck logic of access to fame and disappearance, like a gigantic apparatus of marketing that renews idols at a pace that leaves little room for assimilation. It is not the effervescent explosion of punk, which stood as visceral reaction to all: the ephemeral nature of the phenomenon punk is the equivalent to an explosion that threatens social destitution, a call to revolution that breaks the rules of the music industry from violent and disorderly sounds and performances in chaos and unpredictability. To put it with Greil Marcus (Marcus, 2011), such a movement could only exist, at least in its most honest form, like lightning or a furious jolt before being absorbed by the mirror of the simulacrum. And indeed, that was what happened. Currently, any trace of that state of emergency has been already swallowed up by the system and converted into an also ephemeral product, but in which the sense of uniqueness has been already destroyed, for example with the obscene profusion of the mounted video clip, remounted and reproduced *ad infinitum*. In this respect, there is no distinction between the *reality* of the stage and the *fiction* of the video, because in both cases we talk about total simulation which guarantees 15 minutes of glory to the elected ones who embrace it.

Moreover, the literature does not show a brighter horizon. We have the option of accessing unlimited libraries just by resting our finger on a touch screen, yet the space for literature is buried by the virtual, subordinated to a host of multimedia possibilities. But all of them are presented on an equal footing, because in principle there are not some options standing out from others. Then, why should we think that there has been a subordination? Because, in the agglomeration of activities related to leisure and work on our screen, literature is only an insignificant section, and because its consumption conditions can no longer be the same. The exercise of reading a paper book required exclusive dedication that its digital version no longer uses. But more importantly, the relocation of literature in this virtual environment is marked

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by a determining factor: the rate of consumption and dispersion inculcated by the simulacrum and emphasized by anxiety faced with the mosaic of application differs significantly from that required by the literature in its previous form of consumption. The traditional publishing order and literary production chain are essentially obsolete: the digital form will prevail in self-publishing and make to sift talent from thousands of texts floating in the Internet galaxy an almost impossible task. The appearance of absolute freedom to access the public cannot deceive ourselves, for it essentially unreal. The editorial hierarchies being removed, the religious respect that once we felt for works disappears with them. And with them also disappears respect for the ancient and noble art of translation, because in the digital welter it has lost its leading role in the transmission of knowledge against the imperative of immediacy. In the months prior to the publication of one of the volumes of the Harry Potter saga, many fans could not stand the wait and mobilized to launch unauthorized translations intended to satisfy the hunger of fans. There was little care about the conditions in which the translations had been made, or how many hands had participated in the translation, because the quality of the translation was not important. In fact, the work itself was not important, because what mattered was the image of the work, the promise or expectation that predated it, which can be seen as one of the most direct effects of simulacrum in its proximity to full transparency.

As for artistic expressions like opera or dance, initially from their nature they would offer greater resistance to advancement of the simulacrum. However, its ways are inscrutable and the live experience of both already finds its replacement of balance in the projections of performances in major theaters and opera houses in the world in movie theaters. It is a new simulating reflex that is channeled through a television production, of course different from the live experience, which is treated as a sporting event in which the camera selects the interpretations or emotions that deserve to be highlighted in each time. The very notion of spectacle, the false matching of the experience, which is offered as the possibility of being in the Bolshoi, the Mariinsky or the Metropolitan Opera in a room, and in Wembley or Maracana in the other. Multiplexes no longer represent only the renewal of the film image, they become distributors of world virtuality. At this point one might ask, is there any artistic form that escapes this conversion that makes its own spectral version of what we know as real world? Perhaps it is only possible in arts such as sculpture and comics. The former because it has the benefit of corporeality, perhaps the last stronghold against progressive spectrality. The latter because it creates its own referentiality intrinsically in its language: its form and content is the same thing, and its sequentiality prevents mentioning the loss of aura or reference that occurs in the unitary images. The comic creates its text, its context and even its own paratext – works such as *Watchmen*, by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons, are both their own comment and their own work in progress-, so it escapes the possibility of simulation and rebels against hollowing through self-sufficiency and particularity of their own language.

4. CONCLUSIONS
4.1 After the perfect crime

The Invisible footprint of the simulacrum not only eliminates the essence of artistic expression. In itself, the whole culture that is understood as a mediation with the world is moving towards indeterminacy. The actions that define us as human beings in day to day in relation to that stage that comprises our lives are increasingly more ethereal or are being gradually replaced by scheduled intelligence and technique: cooking, driving, learning ... everything already has its own virtual replacement because food mixers cook for us, cars are parked alone and learning increasingly takes place in the digital sphere, in which we get the promise of directness and flexibility without the traditional mediation of oral transmission. The case of education is particularly serious as it, a cornerstone in shaping the future, no longer enjoys the same basis to continue under optimum conditions with its task of bequeathing knowledge, while it is the victim of fatal capitalization: knowledge is useful only if accompanied by a sense of practicality, if it is associated with the notion of science in the Popperian sense or if it can lead to immediate returns in a successful career. Subjects such as history or philosophy lose their value because their benefits are not immediate in the wisdom of the Individual. Their direct application in the daily life of the individual does not correspond to an economic production that can fit into the capitalist machine. In short, the simulacrum and already strives to conquer the heart of society, there where it could design its aspirations and aim at a horizon of achievement. The latest blow will affect its ability to manage the destitution of the masses in various everyday fronts and also from its very formation. Loss of corporeality is irreversible. Loss of imagination, unbridgeable.

So, we return to the question that motivates this essay, what is left after the perfect crime? And the answer would be nothing, because it will have erased its tracks once it has consummated its perfection. In Its perfection, its effects will already be unrecognizable and there will be no diagnosis to make, because the awareness of a former state of things, a primal notion of reality no longer exists. When the trace has been completely deleted and no imperfection remains, only then there will be an *after* the perfect crime, which will be undetectable. Therefore, it is impossible to see beyond this unlimited frontier in which awareness disappears: In his proposal, Baudrillard already provided last consequences that stretched to infinity even when only ourselves remain in front of the mirror. The best illustration is still the scene of incubators in *The Matrix* (Andy and Larry Wachowski, 1999), which Slavoj Zizek takes as an example in *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (Žižek, 2005). The individuals of that dark world dominated by machines live in capsules asleep, wrapped in placental fluid during their dream of what they mean as reality. The sequence also gives us the clue as to the role of culture in the era of simulacrum: we need this to continue having a leading role as a mediating element in our relationship with the world. The alternative is our expulsion from the world, or rather our self-expulsion by way of the technique and the virtual. Continuing to exalt, without suspicion or resistance, the giant advances of technology in its alleged intention to make our life easier involves giving up every inch of our essence as experiential beings. It also implies to redefine our nature as we change our notion of experience to despise the sensible, the corporeal, for its virtual replica. A recent announcement of Google Glass

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extolled the notion of experience shared through the eyes of another person. It Is the definitive masking, it suggests that each individual can share a portion of the experience of an environment more or less distant through another. What it does not explicitly say is that that experience occurs through a virtualized codification of the essence of that experience. And it is not necessary, because Google and the potential users of the product have already taken for granted that the *virtual* is the *real*, without any cracks through which doubt can leak, without hesitation. That is mediation awaiting us in the tomorrow that is already today. The one that murders and hides the corpse of sensations that open in the body when we finally complete the ascent to a mountain and look down over the horizon, to convince us that the visualization of that little feat through a device is as good or better. Only the preservation of corporeality, of the first person in our actions together with the conscious and mediating use of an eternally incomplete, imperfect culture, can give us the true measure of our presence in the world. The last trick left to us before meeting face to face with our reflection.

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