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I owe you an explanation / Os debo una explicación

Esta es la historia de una promesa, la promesa (del pago) de una deuda y la promesa de una promesa: la promesa de la arquitectura, quizás. Digo: os debo una explicación. ¿Sobre qué? ¿Quién? ¿Yo? ¿Una explicación?

Explicación proviene del latín *explicare*: desplegar. Esta explicación, por tanto, tratará de desplegar, expandir, desarrollar o incluso revelar algunos significados ocultos, o enmascarados, de la deuda (presente). Y al mismo tiempo, intentará erradicar el gran malentendido contemporáneo: aquél que dice que las deudas deben saldarse, que nuestro futuro debe consagrarse a devolver una deuda que, en letras CAPITALES, nunca hemos adquirido...

En primer lugar se desarrollará una cierta genealogía de la deuda, que comienza en Nietzsche (en concreto en el segundo ensayo de su *Genealogía de la moral*), y que pasando por Marcel Mauss y Jacques Derrida alcanza a Maurizio Lazzarato. Seguirá una más breve segunda parte que, desde el punto de vista de la promesa (contrafacto de la deuda), ofrezca una cierta apertura a lo por-venir. Y esta apertura, sospecho, es el lugar de la arquitectura.

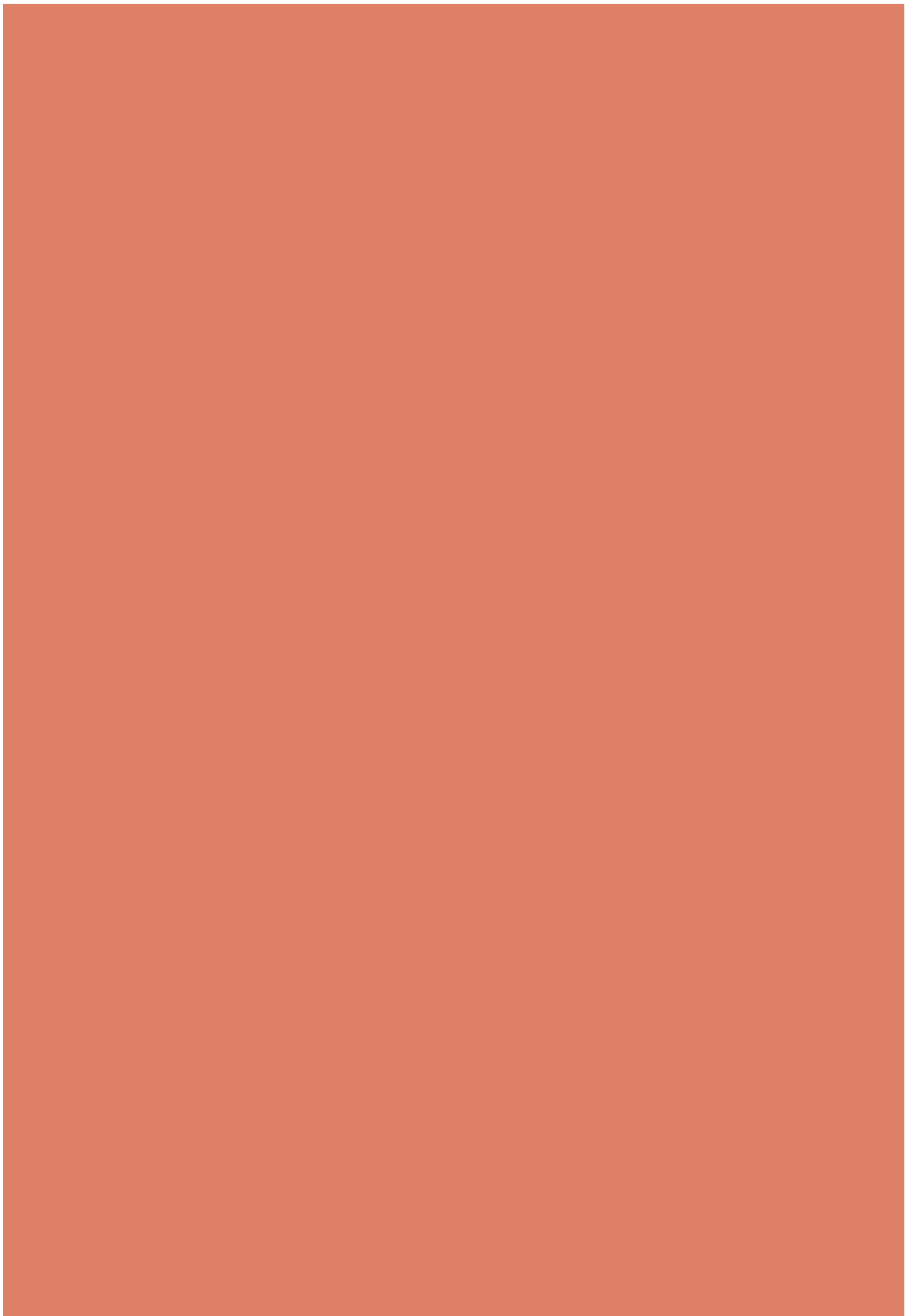
This is the short story of a promise, the promise of (the payment of) a debt and the promise of a promise: the promise of architecture, maybe. I say: I owe you an explanation. About what? Who, I? What? An explanation?

Explanation comes from Latin *explanare*, 'to make level, smooth out' hence the 'make clear' meaning. But in some languages, like Spanish, English 'explanation' translates into 'explicación' that also comes from Latin, this time from *explicare*: to unfold. This explanation, then, will try to unfold, to expand or to unfurl, even to reveal, I hope, some hidden or masked meanings of the (present) debt. And at the same time it will try to erase the great contemporary misunderstanding: that which says that debts should be paid, that our future is to be devoted to reciprocate a debt that. A debt that, in *CAPITAL* letters, we never promised...*

This paper will propose, in its first part, a genealogy of the debt that finds its point of departure in Friedrich Nietzsche (his Second essay *On the Genealogy of Morality*) and goes through Marcel Mauss and Jacques Derrida to Maurizio Lazzarato. Follows a shorter second part that proposes, from the standpoint of the promise (the counterfeit of the debt), a certain opening to what is to come. And this opening, I guess, is the place for architecture.

* 'We have lost a lot of time, and lost a lot, period, by trying to clear our debts. In doing so, we are already guilty! We must recapture this second innocence, rid ourselves of guilt, of everything owed, of all bad conscience, and not repay a cent. We must fight for the cancellation of debt, for debt, one will recall, is not an economic problem but an apparatus of power designed not only to impoverish us, but to bring about catastrophe.'

Maurizio Lazzarato, *The Making Of Indebted Man. Essay on the neoliberal condition* (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2012), 85.





*Como alcalde vuestro que soy, os debo una explicación, y esa explicación que os debo, os la voy a pagar*¹

*I owe you the truth in painting, and I will tell it to you*²

Whatever the payment those two famous quotes promise, the debt will never be cancelled.

Due to the very essence of the due (if there is something that can be called the “essence” of a debt, something that can be repeated, interchanged, substituted, iterated, singled out, identical to itself, beyond re-presentation).

Due to the impossibility of fixing an objective price, of translating the promise of a meaning (the explanation) into the equivalency of the use value (its re-payment), of closing the context (thence paying back a full explanation).

Due to the eternal movement of the currency and the ever flow of the exchange value and its spectral re-turning.

Due to the promise that any debt imposes, the promise of a future in which the debtor is to stand for something that cannot be apprehended as (a) present, that always yields to the future, and in which the creditor could even take the debt upon himself (for example God, Nietzsche said), hence deconstructing the very relation debtor-creditor.

Due to the promise of a democracy (yet) to come.

Due to its impossible restitution: there is no-thing (that could be called a thing) that will be given in return, no-thing that can fulfill in its entirety, in its perfect equivalence, what is owed: the economy of the debt seems to forbid this cancellation, at the same time delaying and reassessing

1. *Bienvenido Mr. Marshall* (1953), directed by Luis García Berlanga. ‘As mayor of you which I am, I owe you an explanation, and that explanation I owe you, that, I am going to pay’. Translation by the author.
2. Letter from Paul Cézanne to Emile Bernard, October 23, 1905, quoted in Jacques Derrida, “Restitutions of the truth in pointing [*pointure*]”, in Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 2.

the debt, shaking both the subject – the subjectivity built in the debtor-creditor relationship as relation of power – and the object – its identity with itself, its adequacy, its truth. The constant circulation, the currency of the unending process of restitution and opening in which any economy of the debt is based (and any economy of the gift) prevents it. As Maurizio Lazzarato³ makes clear, we do live in an economy that has transformed all citizens in debtors (of neoliberal capital), expropriating them of their political space (the space of the promise, the space of the time to come, the space of architecture) to better spoliolate them, producing an infinitization of the debt, and erasing any space for hospitality (unconditional hospitality as opening to what/who is to come). However, a close analysis of this very structure seems to open up a new space for the promise: the promise in the form of a democracy to come and an architecture of the hospitality yet to come.

Due.

This paper, then, will try to shed some light about the structure of the debt, of the economy of the debt and its close relation with what can be called an economy of the gift, an impossible economy in which restitution of the debt is put aside in order to better understand what is at stake when we point to a society structured around the relation debtor-creditor and what the consequences, not always evident, in the present global-neoliberal regime, are. First part, then, will tackle with certain extension on the question of the originality of the relations debtor-creditor in the constitution of ancient societies and the role memory has in it (reading Nietzsche's *On Genealogy of Morality* and his close rendering of debt in the constitution of morality)⁴ only to broaden the scope to the question of the gift and the role interexchange of gifts has (in close relation with debt and credit) as posed by Marcel Mauss (*The Gift*) in some primitive societies, to finally introduce Derrida's deconstruction of this very economy of the gift. This, in turn, will

3. The recent book by Maurizio Lazzarato *The Making Of Indebted Man* (originally published in French in 2011) makes his main argument to rely precisely on this. Hence, just at the beginning he states:

'In Europe, following other regions of the world, the class struggle is currently unfolding and intensified around the issue of debt. The debt crisis is affecting the United States and the UK as well, that is, those countries where the latest financial debacle and, more important, neoliberalism itself originated. The debtor-creditor relationship – the subject of this book – intensifies mechanisms of exploitation and domination at every level of society, for within it no distinction exists between workers and the unemployed, consumers and producers, working and non-working populations, retirees and welfare recipients. Everyone is a "debtor," accountable to and guilty before capital. Capital has become the Great Creditor, the Universal Creditor. As the current "crisis" leaves no room to doubt, property remains one of the major political stakes of neoliberalism, since the creditor-debtor relationship is a product of power relations between owners (of capital) and non-owners (of capital).'

Maurizio Lazzarato, *The Making Of Indebted Man. Essay on the neoliberal condition* (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2012), 2.

4. This analysis should be also extended to the relations of the word gift with guilt and especially with Germans words *Geld* and *Geist*, money being a key moment in relation with value and the fetishization – even spiritualization – of commodities, as Marx explained in *The Capital*. This analysis of money should go through by Marx and Simmel, but also Freud, Deleuze-Guattari and the mentioned Lazzarato. Sadly, we can only make this suggestion at the present.

open up a possibility to cope with (and debunk) the present (perverse) infinitization of the debt in actual global-neoliberal regimes.

From this point, I will briefly try to show how promise, the guarantor of this economy of the debt (for any debt to exist a promise of its fulfillment must be made by a subject —subjectivity— that in turns is built upon this very capacity), nevertheless opens up a whole new space (or space interrupting time: *spacing*), one that in its character of a-waiting deconstructs and subverts this apparently insurmountable structure of power allowing a different architectural (political) space to arrive: the one of democracy, but a democracy, as Derrida will insist, always *to come*.

Finally, strongly connected with the above mentioned, I will propose architecture as the privileged *locus* in which this promise promises (certain performativity is at work), and in consequence debunks the present situation of dominance and control the Capital imposes on us thorough the mechanism of debt, effectively producing a different space for politics (or the political) to appear, a *public* space.

1. The debt

To breed an animal with the prerogative to promise – is that not precisely the paradoxical task which nature has set herself with regard to humankind? Is it not the real problem of humankind?

(Emphasis by Nietzsche).⁵

This is how Nietzsche opens his Second essay of his *On Genealogy of Morality*, entitled “Guilt”, “bad conscience” and related matters’. We may wonder why, if I am to talk about ‘the debt’, I begin, on the one hand, with a text that is focused on the idea of ‘promise’ (and its ‘opposing force, *forgetfulness*’ – Nietzsche’s emphasis –), and on the other hand why Nietzsche entitles his essay with the word ‘guilt’, and not ‘debt’, if he is supposed to talk about the latter. To the second question, the answer lies in the original German word Nietzsche employs, *Schuld*, that covers both the meaning of ‘debt’ and ‘guilt’⁶, morality according Nietzsche linking one with the other: what was a simple – payable – debt being transformed into an infinite guilt (accounting for two different economies of debt, then). We will follow Nietzsche’s steps with more detail on that. To the former, the answer is even more interesting, since it involves both the constitution of

5. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 35. Nietzsche begins his Second essay, “Guilt”, “bad conscience” and related matters’ precisely with this sentence.

6. And that, interestingly enough, is linked with English should, making the relation with promise the more startling. See Rafael Winkler, ‘I owe you: Nietzsche, Mauss’ in *Journal of British Society for Phenomenology*, Vol 38, No1, January 2007, 91: “*Schuld*”, which means at once “debt”, “guilt”, “blame” (a word which is also associated to the Gothic, “*skulan*” “to owe, be under obligation”, the English, “should”, the Middle English, “*sculan*”, “obligation”, which also includes the sense of “futuraity”).’

a subjectivity (the capacity to promise implies an individual that com-promises his word, the 'I will tell it to you' of Cézanne) and the prioritization of time over space as the constitutional trait in ancient communities. In short: when Nietzsche proposes a genealogy of man in society, he places at the center the relation between debtor and creditor, an economy of the debt, that basically involves time, memory and promise (which, by the way, involves necessary techniques to be implemented upon the body of men, hence it is a bio-technical beginning) as its fundamental glue. Because Nietzsche thinks that this relation debtor-creditor is the original one that establishes society and not the economical or symbolical relations: 'the community has the same basic relationship to its members as the creditor to the debtor.'⁷

How this debtor-creditor relation was established, or why? It seems that for Nietzsche it involves a relation of power between the different actors: not a relation of 'equality', as can be certified in a contract, but a relationship between inequalities, in which, as latter Marcel Mauss will discuss in his essay about the gift⁸, the important thing is to acquire, through this relation, a position of power in which someone is to be indebted to some other. This fundamental relation of inequality also stems for the impossible cancellation of debts. Mauss showed it clearly in relation to the *potlatch*, the archaic form of social interchange found (among other peoples) in the Northwestern tribes of America. In this ancient phenomenon of the circulation of wealth, the different tribes or families were immersed in continuous interchange of gifts with the goal of acquiring power in front of the other's eyes (also to forge alliances, challenge the adversaries and so on), which produces a desire (or an obligation) to reciprocate the gifts received in a way that some interests were given. This interchange implies two main things: time and interest, which is the same that to say credit (in a very modern sense in fact. Mauss calculated that the 'credit' in circulation in those societies exceeds notably the actual existence of goods and commodities to repay it, not so far from what we see today, then. Credit always implies an excess). In addition, it involves an obligation: what seems to be the result of a liberality in the use of the surplus in wealth of those tribes, is in fact an obligation that imposes charges (and this is important) both in the debtor *and* the creditor (for Mauss the gift in fact involves three demands: 'the obligation to give, the obligation to receive and reciprocate'⁹). Since each gift cannot exactly match the original one – which is impossible – but has to be returned with interests, what could be called an economy of credit is produced, one that imposes on the one hand a delay in time – gifts are to be returned in the future, it is not a question of simultaneous interchange, and even in a given, fixed time – and on the other an effective memory that accounts for the debts – and interests up to the 100% per year – an economy of desire in fact, which builds also a collective unconscious and a symbolical recording. Credit

7. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, op. cit., 46.

8. Marcel, Mauss. *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies* (London: Routledge, 2002)

9. Marcel, Mauss. *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, op. cit., 50.

is here not the material, quantifiable amount of ‘money’ that could be lent, but the power derived from the capacities of each tribe or group of persons to reciprocate. It is, mainly, a question of honor. For Mauss this economy of the debt do not concern individuals, but social groups, and it is not primarily based in economical transactions (of prices of goods) but involves the whole economy of life, from exchanges of goods to rituals, war, woman and children, banquets, dance festivals and so on, ruling over society as its main frame.

Returning to Nietzsche’s essay, and to the individual, he aptly finds that a man that can promise is a man that can, at the same time and necessarily, to forget¹⁰ (can and should I am tempted to say). Memory, the one that stores the acts subject to debt – to be retrieved at any moment they will be demanded –, the one that allows a promise to be held on time, this archival machine, it is also a machine that forgets. But it does so in an active manner, as an almost technical process. Forgetting – as its reversal promising – is according to Nietzsche not an unconscious act, nor it descends to the physiological level of the basal functions of man (its mere animality?), but involves will and especially involves technique, a machinic set of technical operations, physical as well as mental, that allows memory to function – and in turns, ‘active forgetfulness’, leaves space for ‘the nobler functions and functionaries, for ruling, predicting, predetermining’¹¹. Memory is, then, a conscious act, a necessary motion incardinated in our will to survival; but its main function, its primary goal according Nietzsche is not to store things in it – dues, debts, obligations –, but to forget them. ‘Forgetfulness is not just a *vis inertiae*, as superficial people believe, but is rather an active ability to suppress, positive in the strongest sense of the word’¹² says Nietzsche. Hence a technical apparatus that imposes memory on man is needed, one that counteracts the forgetfulness motion: ‘*mnemonics*’ (or rather *mnemotecnics*). And this is an apparatus of control and power – biopower¹³ since it will involve human body.¹⁴ Memory, as Plato reminds us in *Phaedrus*, always involve a technique.

As said, the space of memory is the space of the body. And memory, as sustain of the debtor-creditor relationship and of the responsibility of the individual, attested by punishment, needs to be actively imposed on man. Nietzsche draws then from ancient German law and give us

10. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, op. cit., 35.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. Although, of course, the reference here is Foucault, we are not going to follow that thread now. In any case it is important to have it in mind. Bibliography is immense, but see for the initial discussion Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population. Lectures at the Collège de France* (Hampshire, UK: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005) and Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics* (Hampshire, UK: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008). In direct reference to architecture it should be noted the following book: Sven-Olov Wallenstein, *Bio-Politics and the Emergence of Modern Architecture* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2009).

14. ‘A thing must be burnt in so that it stays in the memory: only something that continues to hurt stays in the memory’ says Nietzsche. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, op. cit., 38.

some straightforward examples of the different punishments (tortures) inflicted to people to make them remember, remember his debt (stoning, breaking on the wheel, impaling, ripping apart, boiling in oil, cutting flesh from the breast...¹⁵). Pain, the inscription of physical traits on the body, is 'the most powerful aid to mnemonics'.¹⁶

Two or three interesting questions arise here. The process by which a man is allowed to make a promise implies its taming¹⁷, its conversion in a docile and domestic animal, rid of its wild particularities, but paradoxically it also involves a different perception of time, so to say, a subversion or disjointment of time perceived as the continuum of consecutive 'presents', as calculated and predictable presence.

Man should be transformed into a '*reliable, regular, necessary*'¹⁸ being in order to be considered as an actor in this relationship. The demands of society are, then, the transformation of man in a calculable animal, one that can calculate and one that can be calculated, so to say predicted. Prediction is an imposition of society upon man (in exchange for security), society tries to uniform men at the same time that gives them a certain amount of freedom in the sense that individuates, gives them conscience, makes them a '*sovereign individual*', since it is necessary an individual to be responsible of his/her debts, one that can be responsible, empowered with 'the proud knowledge of the extraordinary privilege of *responsibility*'¹⁹. Man has to answer for his own future:

*'That is precisely what constitutes the long history of the origins of responsibility. That particular task of breeding an animal with the prerogative to promise includes, as we have already understood, as precondition and preparation, the more immediate task of first making man to a certain degree necessary, uniform, a peer amongst peers, orderly and consequently predictable.'*²⁰

But then Nietzsche introduces a new twist, that transforms effectively debt into guilt, and that, most interestingly, makes the debt unpayable: the relation debtor-creditor is transformed into a 'relationship of the *present generation* to their *forebears*'²¹, in a debt with the antecessors. This original debt with the ancestors, with the forefathers (because their original 'sacrifices and deeds' they made in the primeval times as founders of the lineage) has to be paid back also with sacrifices and deeds that, according to Nietzsche, replicate the original ones. But, as time passes, the figure of the ancients grows bigger, and so they do the demands of reciprocity (plus the interests), to the point that the debt becomes impossible to pay back, that becomes infinite. The original debt with the ancestors, by now transformed

15. Ibid., 39.

16. Ibid., 38.

17. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, op. cit., 56-57 and 63.

18. Ibid., 36.

19. Ibid., 37.

20. Ibid., 36.

21. Ibid., 60.

into gods, becomes unpayable. And, this is important, this situation transforms the original, individual relation between debtor and creditor into a collective one, a debt that affects to all the members of the community independently of their particular relations. The whole community is now indebted, regardless the actual involvement of any of its members, indebted to a creditor that now surpasses the same society and seems to be placed above, or beyond: god himself. The debt is then transformed into the conscience of guilt, and interiorized as such, as irredeemable and original. The transition from debt to guilt (*Schuld*) is now clear. According to Nietzsche, this situation reaches its maximum in monotheistic religions, and finds its paradoxical resolution in Christianity, in which God himself imposes upon himself (upon his beloved son) the task of cancelling this infinite guilt.²² ‘Bad conscience’, the transformation into a moral of the conscience of debt marks out the transition towards the ideas of ‘God’ and ‘Devil’ as ‘bestiality of thought’. And Nietzsche adds:

‘We have here a sort of madness of the will showing itself in mental cruelty which is absolutely unparalleled: man’s will to find himself guilty and condemned without hope of reprieve, his will to think of himself as punished, without the punishment ever being equivalent to the level of guilt [...]’²³

Perversion is complete: now man is forced to remember his debts in even a more powerful way, since he interiorized the idea of debt as eternal and irredeemable sin, as irretrievable guilt. The debt is securely stored in memory forever. Man is now perfectly tamed, domesticated, transformed into the perfect citizen that only knows that his task is to pay a debt, forever and with no redemption in this life. Christian morals, especially in its protestant version, and Capitalist morals seem to be very close now, even more if we consider the present neoliberal power, most evident since the debt crisis of 2008 on, in which all of us have been transformed in the most unchaste way in debtors to the great capital, wherever we like it or not²⁴.

Anyway, the key point in Nietzsche’s argument is the transition from an economy of the debt, in which the debts can, in fact must, be paid, in reciprocal exchange, and in which society is built upon the elements that can guarantee this constant reciprocation (memory and forgetfulness), to the constitution of power as one exerted upon the body of the individuals (through punishment) that guarantee the memory of the debt, and to another one, the Christian one, in which the debt has been infinitized and transformed into guilt, producing in the debtor the idea of bad conscience, hence controlling both its body and its consciousness from *within*.

22. ‘Christianity’s stroke of genius: none other than God sacrificing himself for man’s debt, none other than God paying himself back, God as the only one able to redeem man from what, to man himself, has become irredeemable – the creditor sacrificing himself for his debtor, out of love (would you credit it? –), out of love for his debtor!...’ Ibid., 63.

23. Ibid., 64.

24. With the *socialization* of debt as the States has been transformed in the debtors of the private debt of banks and companies, and citizens in the ultimate payers.

Yet a paradoxical moment appears in Nietzsche's argumentation, one that traces a particular link with Derrida's notion of the gift that we should explore now. It is the moment when Nietzsche presents us the idea of *mercy*²⁵. The only possibility for Nietzsche that accounts for a cancellation of the ever going process of restitutions implied in the now infinitized debtor-creditor relation is the one that comes from the unconditionality (Derrida's term) of *mercy* (or *grace*²⁶). Mercy finds 'his way of being beyond the law'²⁷ in the sense that it abolishes or better saying suspends the legal relationship between debtor and creditor, by taking the debt upon the creditor himself. Of course this is the prerogative of the powerful ('What do I care about my parasites'²⁸), implying the sovereignty of an act beyond the law, the prerogative of the one that can concede mercy (it is not exactly the same that Christian redemption of sin) who asks nothing in return and that uninterestedly cancels the debt; but it also betrays something that is deeply incardinated in the economy of the debt and the gift: its impossible reciprocity. Only an unconditional act, an act beyond the law, would have the power of making as if the obligations implied in the debt – either in the debtor or the creditor part – could be cancelled. Is this possible? Or is this the trap always involved in the economy of the debt/gift, as Derrida seems to think? For Derrida, for mercy (for the gift: is it not mercy the ultimate gift, the one which cancels all other gifts?) to exist, it has to go unnoticed, unmarked as mercy (as full reciprocation, as cancellation), in other case it will cause obligations on both parts: the debtor whose debt is cancelled will become again indebted with a due of gratitude, the creditor will be satisfied with his 'good action', hence being repaid in moral or symbolic instead of economical terms.

At that point we should introduce Derrida's reading of Marcel Mauss *The Gift* as presented in *Given Time*²⁹. In that text Derrida begins with an analysis of the translations Mauss uses of different words from different cultures and times to the concept of 'gift', questioning even the existence of something as 'the gift' (the word) that can operate as general translation of all those words. Then, the first question is if something like 'the gift' really exists.

But what seems at the beginning only a pure textual analysis, we quickly realize that puts in question the whole structure Mauss presented, and in fact the whole structure of an economy of debt based in the interchange of 'gifts'. The generalization of the structure proposed by Nietzsche, the original structure of societies around the relation debtor-creditor (which, I remind, are relations of power, as Mauss also acknowledges: 'It is a struggle between nobles to establish a hierarchy

25. Ibid., 47-48.

26. Although I do not have space now, nevertheless it will be interesting to follow certain correspondences with Simone Weil's concept of *grace*. See Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace* (Lincoln, NE: Bison Books-University of Nebraska Press, 1997).

27. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, op. cit., 48.

28. Ibid.

29. Jaques Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).

amongst themselves from which their clan will benefit at a later date³⁰), the questions around the ambiguity between debt and the responsibility of both debtor and creditor, the disjointment of time memory implies (its delayed economy of desire) were somehow radically rethought when we become aware of the *aporia* inserted at the center of the word.³¹ The slippage between debt and gift is nevertheless not as strange as it may appear if we think it with the current concepts of credit and debt (and gift). As Mauss shows and as Nietzsche seems to recognize, this relationship, the economy that produces, is an original one that deals with interchange, interchange not even primarily of economical (money) nature, but interchange as the primary social act, in which the interexchange of things, honors, possessions and so on regulates the whole symbolical and economical operation of societies in a (supposedly) uninterested way. What is given and what is received back to reciprocate the given is what creates this debtor-creditor relation, hence what is given in the 'gift' is what is at the center of the process.

In any case, as said before, the important issue in Derrida's strategy is the pass towards an unconditionality of the gift which implies the deconstruction of the formalized relations of power between debtor and creditor, one that imposes an irreducible difference with the later (and present) market economy³², regulated, precisely, by the conditionality, the interest, the cold calculation (and Nietzsche showed how calculation transformed man into a *predictable* animal, a *tamed* one) and the rationalization of cost analysis. Unconditionality of the gift is the absolute reverse of the purely economical exchange, and should not (in fact it is not) be polluted by the calculus of loss and earnings characteristic of the market. Gift then, is traversed by the double constitution of, as Derrida says, the "if...then": If the gift appears or signifies itself, if it exists or if it is presently as gift, as what it is, then it is not, it annuls itself.³³ In that sense, 'gift' for Derrida is something

30. Marcel, Mauss. *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, op. cit., 8.

It will also be interesting to follow part of this thread in Bataille's *The Accursed Share*, with his ideas on expenditure and total and disinterested waste (consumption) precisely as a way of measuring power against power.

31. '[...] the gift not only owes nothing, remains foreign to the circle of the debt, but must not answer to its own essence, must not even be what it has to be, namely, a gift.'

Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), note 23, 69.

32. The quotation is long, but I think it renders thing crystal clear. Says Derrida: *Now the gift, if there is any, would no doubt be related to economy. One cannot treat the gift, this goes without saying, without treating this relation to economy, even to the money economy. But is not the gift, if there is any, also that which interrupts economy? That which, in suspending economic calculation, no longer gives rise to exchange? That which opens the circle so as to defy reciprocity or symmetry, the common measure, and so as to turn aside the return in view of the no-return? If there is gift, the given of the gift (that which one gives, that which is given, the gift as given thing or as act of donation) must not come back to the giving (let us not already say to the subject, to the donor). It must not circulate, it must not be exchanged, it must not in any case be exhausted, as a gift, by the process of exchange, by the movement of circulation of the circle in the form of return to the point of departure. If the figure of the circle is essential to economics, the gift must remain uneconomic.*

Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, op. cit., 7.

33. *Ibid.*, 27.

impossible, or it is another way of saying 'the impossible'. If for a gift to exist, a real gift, a purely disinterested one, one that does not wait for any other thing in reward (and then can be submitted to a pure interchange rid of any interest and calculus) there can be no reciprocity, no counter-gift that can generate another debt (nullifying then the economical and symbolical circulation of the debt), this 'real' gift, the 'thing', cannot have any recognizable entity (cannot be identical to itself, iterable and so on), since in that case a substitute for this gift can be found. But it is not only the identity with itself of the thing *gift* what is deconstructed, it is also the economical circulation as said, since for a gift not being reciprocated, it has to go unnoticed, it has to not have had place, it has to nullify itself in time and space. Then 'we require simultaneously of the gift that it appear and that it not appear in its essence, in what it has to be, in what it will have had to be'.³⁴

2. The promise

At that point we have to ask what the relations this economy of the debt/gift imposes in relation to time. If debts are to be returned, gifts reciprocated, memory sustained, it seems clear that an injunction to the future is made. One in which memory acts as the guarantor of the future, standing for the promise of a reciprocation yet to come. For Nietzsche, we mentioned that, active forgetfulness (the *natural*, the *animal* estate of men) can be counteracted through the, equally active, operation of memory. If an effort has to be made to forget an equal effort is to be made to remember. Hence,

*'[A]ctive desire not to let go, a desire to keep desiring what has been, on some occasion, desired, really it is the will's memory so that a world of strange new things, circumstances and even acts of will may be placed quite safely in between the original 'I will', 'I shall do' and the actual discharge of the will, its act, without breaking this long chain of the will.'*³⁵

The interesting point is that this control of memory is in fact what allows man to 'view the future as the present and anticipate it', in the sense that making man reliable, capable of making promises and sustaining them in time, it introduces a paradoxical consequence: it is memory, the storage of events, the archival of the past what appears as the one which can anticipate future, that can be responsible for it and make it present, as future that comes from the past, as an *act of will* that defers the satisfaction of the original desire. Memory is, then, memory of the future. And accordingly, time is somehow disjointed, either in Freudian (repression) or Derridean terms (the specter), through phantasmaticization of events. This will lead us to the classical Derrida's book on Marx and the specter (Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx. The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*), which, among other things, is a coming to terms with promise.

34. Ibid.

35. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, op. cit., 36.

In that sense, in its close relation with memory and desire, the structure of the debt opens up the structure of the promise. Nevertheless it should be thought in a slightly different way: maybe the important part of the relation debt-promise is not the debt part, the part of an economy of indebtedness and payment, the original relation of power between debtor and creditor that Nietzsche analyzes and that has led us to a particular economical frame (capitalism in its neoliberalist incarnation) and political regime (present liberal democracies), but the promise part. What can be called an economy of the promise, or, put in different terms, the opening of a new space that the promise promises, in which the performativity³⁶ of the promise, beyond a recognition of the debt involves memory as precisely what holds on the time to come (not exactly the future or not the future as a present not yet present, but future as the totally unexpected) is what is at stake.

The structure of the promise opens up historicity as something to come and also as the very structure of democracy. In that sense, democracy, for Jacques Derrida³⁷, is not something that exists in the present, not that even can exist never in the present as something present, but is always something to come. And, in addition, and what is more interesting for us here, the democratic promise, its effectivity, opens up a hospitality³⁸, and hence opens up a space, a public space traversed by this disjointed time, the space, or the possibility of the space for architecture to become fully architecture.

The promise opens up the time to come, *l'avenir*, and in so doing, effectively deconstructs subjectivity, builds responsibility and allows a space of awaiting to appear. The promise is the opening up to the other, the coming into terms with other, the absolute Other, the radical alterity and in that sense, calls for unconditional hospitality. The promise always promises in the form of the “may be”, and in that sense, the promise frees itself from the logic of economical circulation.

This space so opened is not a space I promise to you (as an architect, for example), but should be the result of your/our promises. In that sense the (public: and how can be otherwise than public the space of the *polis*?)

36. Relationship between performative, ‘speech acts’ theory and the promise can be found, precisely in relationship with the text by Cézanne that opens up this paper in Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 3-4.

There Derrida points to the singularity of the event the promise produces as supplement of a supplement: ‘Henceforth the promise does not make an event as does any “speech act”: as a supplement to the act which it is or constitutes, it “produces” a singular event which depends on the performative structure of the utterance-a promise’.

37. The transition from promise to democracy may seem too abrupt, in great part because I have not enough space here to develop the full transition. This is a topic to which Jacques Derrida came once and again since the nineties in many different places and contexts. See for example Jacques Derrida, *The Other Heading* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992), 78: ‘[B]ut a democracy that must have the structure of a promise – and thus the memory of that which carries the future, the to-come, here and now.’

38. Again, the introduction of ‘hospitality’ here is too much an interruption, and I apologize for that. In this case, see Jacques Derrida and Anne Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000).

space of the city (*polis*) is the space of the promise, in which no debt has to be cancelled to enter in, but rather is the one that cancels all the debts, even without rest.

Promised space, the space that should be opened not by the architect (which only is the herald, the prophet of what is to come) but by the promise itself, cannot be abstracted. The transformation (by the capital) of concrete space into abstract space is somehow equivalent to the transformation of concrete labour into abstract labour (Marx, *The Capital*). Abstract labour, as abstract space can be measured and can be translated into money. Abstract space is transformed into a commodity, something that can be purchased and sold, and even fetishized. Abstract space is produced space, and enters into the reign of the (exchange) value. Promised space, instead, frees itself from this economical evaluation. The appropriation by the capital of space as abstract space, the closing up of its inherent openness is what we should unmask and fight against. How subtle capitalism is in its re-appropriation of what is most opposed to it (as the radical structure of the promise, as the absolute freedom of space) is what we have to have clear.

The appropriation of the radical structure of the promise by the capital, and its subsequent deactivation and transformation into a means of control should be, then, made explicit by radically rethinking the structure of the debt and unmasking its actual perversion. Because the debt cannot be imposed from above, it only can be the result of a promise (of a “may be”), and because its openness to what is to come, its very essence then (I am tempted to say: its freedom), is blocked through the inversion neoliberalism (but in fact the very structure of capitalism, though enhanced and perfected) operates concerning time. If, on the one hand, the very structure of debt opens up the possibility of the promise, introduces both delay and pre-vision, on the other hand it could be easily closed through the imposing mechanism of extraction of present days. In *consuming* the future, in making actual the earnings of the future by way of generalization of the debt into the mass of citizens/consumer of present day liberal democracies, neoliberalism consistently blocks this very future that the original economy of the debt opens up. It is not only that it actualizes the profits (to make them secure?), makes present the future profits, exhausting the consumer, it is not only that it *socializes* the companies debts transferring it to the Nation-States and hence to the common people transforming each citizen into a debtor like it or not, it is that, by consuming the future, it robs the capacities of action, of decision, closing effectively any possibility for life (and, by the way, controlling in a dreadful extension of the biopolitical power the behavior of the governed: as Nietzsche said, it makes man predictable, calculable at the highest extend)³⁹⁴⁰ and closes the opening space of architecture.

39. Hence Lazzarato says: '[D]ebt appropriates not only the present labor time of wage-earners and of the population in general, it also preempts non-chronological time, each person's future as well as the future of society as a whole.' And further on: 'Whereas in industrial societies there still existed an "open" time – in the form of progress or revolution – today, the future and its possibilities, quashed by huge sums of money mobilized by finance and devoted to reproducing capitalist power relations, seem to be frozen. For debt simply neutralizes time, time as the creation of new possibilities, that is to say, the raw material of all political, social, or esthetic change. Debt harnesses and exercises the power of destruction/creation, the power of choice and decision.'

Maurizio Lazzarato, *The Making Of Indebted Man. Essay on the neoliberal condition*, op. cit., 22-23.

Postscript

How architecture may (and in this injunction resides its very possibility) be the place from which a different relation between society, power and economy could be though? Of course this is not an easy answer, one that can be given, as a gift, in the brief space that rests... A tentative, provisional answer will be: as an opening and always as a task, as the constant work of *pro-jection* since this space opened needs to be sustained, hold on, in constant process of becoming. Architecture so understood will be strongly political, since always involves an active transformation of what exists (as a heritage, since always architecture is an heritage: 'Inheritance is never a *given*, it is always a task'⁴⁰), the holding on of a space in which democracy (architecture as the one that builds up the *public space*⁴¹) could be *to come*, and the unmasking of the appropriation of time *and* space by reestablishing difference, disequilibrium, the unexpected at the heart(h) of the city.

40. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx. The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), 67.

41. For an analysis of the constitution of public space as public space in ancient Greece see: María de la O del Santo Mora and José Vela Castillo, '...or how to build the void in the city' in H.G. Lippert/R-M. Gollan/A. Köth (Ed.): *un|planbar. Agora un Void. Die Funktion der Mitte in Architektur und Städtebau*, (Dresden: Thelem, 2013), 159-180.

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