

Mnemotechnics of cruelty

Santiago Lucendo

ABSTRACT: Starting from Maurizio Lazzarato's reworking of the debtor/guilty concept developed by Nietzsche in his work *On the Genealogy of Morality*, the present article approaches the images that represent debt in the context of present capitalism. We will also see how debt and the indebted individual take part in a broader repertoire of images that, by their particular harshness and reference to the body, are easily taken in. These are the images that constitute the 'mnemotechnics of cruelty'. But the same images that serve to consolidate the memory, or its elaborations in the domain of gothic horror fiction, can as well function in a critical sense. Here we are no longer talking about debt but of the use of art-horror images as part of a progressive machinery, or simply a liberating one, among which stands out the image of the vampire. The images used to denounce the abuses of capital establish, from the 18th century, the 'gothic capitalism': a vision of the modern world through images from another time.

KEYWORDS: Image, debt, horror, gothic novel, vampire..

*The present essay starts from the ideas on the making of the indebted man discussed in the seminar with Maurizio Lazzarato, held in the end of June 2012 at the Facultad de Bellas Artes [Faculty of Fine Arts], Universidad Complutense de Madrid (<http://www.imaginarrar.net/seminario/lazzarato.html>), and from his essay *The Making of the Indebted Man. An Essay on the Neoliberal Condition*. To Lazzarato's ideas I then responded with a 'visual essay' based on previous research on the image of the vampire that gave rise to the present article and that must still be understood, in part, as a play of images. It is dedicated to Carlos Cespedosa Pita (1977-2011), whose friendship and unforgettable memory represent the opposite of what the text is about. A true mnemotechnic of generosity that invites me to fight and to which I am forever indebted.

**The present essay proposes two different ways of reading images: one, more directed, guided by the written words and following a path of images that are described or reproduced. The other, more visual, points to the essential, whereby the reader can go through the text jumping exclusively between excerpted quotations and images.

There is perhaps nothing more fearful and more terrible in the entire pre-history of human beings than the technique for developing his memory. "We burn something in so that it remains in the memory. Only something which never ceases to cause pain stays in the memory"

Nietzsche (1887: 88)

"How does one create a memory for the human animal?" asks Nietzsche (1887) in his essay *On The Genealogy of Morality*. How does one build him a conscience, make him trustworthy and faithful to his promises? ...with blood, he replies. The way in which man has become predictable in time, his reliability – a persistent idea in current economics –, has been forged with sacrifices and mutilations, stonings and impalements, boilings in oil or wine, with skinning and quarterings of bodies (p. 28). By means of punishment we learned to be as good as our word, that failing to keep our

promises, or not paying back our debts, can led to cruel and measured punishment. Nietzsche (1887) reminds us that “the major moral principle “guilt” [Schuld] derives its origin from the very materialistic idea “debt” [Schulden]” (p. 29); thus, at the source of the correspondence between the betrayal of the promise and the calculated cruelty of the punishment, lies the relationship between creditor and debtor:

In order to inspire trust in his promise to pay back, in order to give his promise a guarantee of its seriousness and sanctity, in order to impress on his own conscience the idea of paying back as a duty, an obligation, the debtor, by virtue of the contract, pledges to the creditor, in the event that he does not pay, something that he still “owns,” something over which he still exercises power, for example, his body or his wife or his freedom or even his life [...] (Nietzsche, 1887: 93)

According to Nietzsche (1887), the relationship between creditor and debtor plays a fundamental role in the shaping of conscience. Conscience is forged by brutal scenes, taking us back to a “period when human beings had not yet become ashamed of their cruelty” (p. 31). Some of those episodes, like the debt repayment in flesh, have inspired fictional characters such as *The Merchant of Venice’s* (Shakespeare, 1596-97) Shylock [1]. But in Shakespeare’s times it was already a memory of the past, whereas Nietzsche describes it as a common agreement:

The creditor could inflict all kinds of ignominy and torture on the body of the debtor—for instance, slicing off the body as much as seemed appropriate for the size of the debt. And this point of view early on and everywhere gave rise to precise, sometimes horrific estimates going into finer and finer details, legally established estimates about individual limbs and body parts. (Nietzsche, 1887: 93)

Nietzsche’s *Genealogy* (1887) uncovers the cruelty at the origin of debt and the foundation of a trust-based society. The reliability of the promise conceals a savage background, which at the same time is “all-too-human” (p. 31); “the essential work of a man on his own self” (p. 26). This is a process of consolidation that includes the threat of past punishments, through images and/or memories:

With the help of such images and procedures [he has recently referred to the stoning, the wheel, the impalement, etc.] people finally retained five or six ‘I will not’s’ in their memory, and so far as these precepts were concerned they gave their word in order to live with the advantages of society – and that was that! With the assistance of this sort of memory people finally came to ‘reason’! (Nietzsche, 1887: 90)

Nietzsche does not specify what kind of images is he referring to –sights or memories of tortures, direct testimonies, subtle threats, narrated scenes, descriptions, graphic images... – but, in any case, these are images of cruelty that, by their special rawness, belong to certain mnemotechnics that aim to retain in memory the consequences of failing to keep the promise.

Nietzsche established that the foundation of society, the domestication of man, and, in short, conscience, are the result of the relationship between creditor and debtor. From there, Maurizio Lazzarato (2011) – to whose approach this essay is indebted – describes the role that the debt/guilt economy plays in the configuration of subjectivities in the contemporary context. Trying to “analyze the debt economy and the production of indebted man” (p. 11) in *The Making of the Indebted Man. An Essay on the Neoliberal Condition* (2011), Lazzarato reflects about the kind of machinery that is producing this indebted man [2]. In order to approach to this machinery of making indebted and guilty subjects, he borrows appropriately

from the “Second Essay” of *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1887). Lazzarato (2011) warns that an important change has taken place in the last decades by which “debt and the creditor-debtor relationship” have become the “subjective paradigm of modern-day capitalism” and not the changes in the organization of labour (p. 38). The relationship between creditor and debtor, on which – in Nietzsche’s words – progress and conscience were founded, has become a transversal relationship that includes the rest and affects everyone:

The creditor-debtor relationship encompasses capital/labor, Welfare-State service/users, and business/consumers relations, just as it cuts through them, instituting users, workers, and consumers as ‘debtors’. (Lazzarato, 2011: 30)

In this perspective, we are all debtors, responsible and guilty before capital (Lazzarato 2011, p. 7) [3]. Yet it is clear that the procedures and techniques by which the indebted subject is constituted, are customized and fit to each and every one; from the credit card and unemployment benefits to the control over livestock or sovereign debt.

Lazzarato (2011) thus aims “to construct the theoretical weapons for the struggles to come” (p. 11). I will not get into the details of his account concerning this mechanism of subjection, but I will try to address the role of the images within that process – an issue tackled indirectly in his text. This will be a necessarily incomplete approach, for obvious reasons of space and time, but also because it is a process that is constantly in the making. The central questions are, therefore, what is the role of the images within the machine of making guilty/debtor subjects? and how do images of terror function in that struggle? The cornerstone to understanding the functioning of images in this process of subjection is the expression used by Lazzarato to address the mnemotechnic process described by Nietzsche, which is also the term that names this essay: “The performative of the promise implies and presupposes a ‘mnemotechnics’ of cruelty and a mnemotechnics of pain, which, like the machine of Kafka’s penal colony, inscribe the promise of debt repayment on the body itself” (Lazzarato, 2011: 40). In that mnemotechnics, which guarantee the performativity of the promise, the images of cruelty play a decisive role; at least that is what I try to state in the present essay.

At this key moment of his discourse, Lazzarato appeals to Kafka, comparing Nietzsche’s text to the torture device described in his work *In the Penal Colony* (1919). The text relates the execution of a punishment after a non-existing trial. The penalty consisted in the inscription, on the offender’s body, of a design that described the broken law, by means of a complex device. Following a blueprint, the part called harrow engraves with needles a design over the tied body; the design describes the commandment the person has transgressed. The process is long and painful. It is useless to describe the uncanny and fanciful process if it has not been experienced previously, but its simple evocation, once recorded in the reader’s memory, sparks a vivid understanding by means of shock: the inscription of the debt in the body is part of the constitution of the indebted subject [4].

Kafka’s writing inscribes the law on the reader’s body; its evocation is enough to awaken pain – a fictive pain – that allows a direct understanding of the mnemotechnics of cruelty. Nietzsche’s words about the foundation of conscience acquire another dimension:

The proud knowledge of the extraordinary privilege of responsibility, (...) [has] **become internalized into the deepest parts** of him and grown instinctual, have now become a dominating instinct. What will he call it, this dominating instinct, given that he finds he needs a word for it? There’s no doubt about this question: the sovereign man calls this instinct his conscience. [Italics are Nietzsche’s, bolds are mine.] (Nietzsche, 1887: 87)

I would like to point out here that Lazzarato is using a device which is analogue to the mechanics he is trying to denounce, darkening his words with Kafka's image. "We burn something in so that it remains in the memory", says Nietzsche (1887, p. 28). The images seems tailored to perfectly fit the *Genealogy*. Kafka's device expresses – and *does*, above all – as much to explain the making of the indebted subject and the performative uses of images than the lengthy argumentation that follows. Thus the debt/guilt ends up inscribed over the body, with "the help of such images and procedures" (Nietzsche, 1887, p. 28), the same procedures that Lazzarato will borrow from fiction.

If we look at it in perspective we will observe that the mobilization of images occurs in two opposed directions. On one side we have those that are involved in the production of the indebted subject; images from a cruel past like that referred by Nietzsche, but also the mental pictures of the consequences of failing to pay off a mortgage, *seeing* oneself on the street. They are images at the service of control and trust that can facilitate the construction of a trustworthy subject by means of pain. On the other side we have the images which, while displaying the same cruelty, open up to the possibility of a critical reading, openly contrary or in struggle against the control mechanism that debt has become. To the latter group belongs Kafka's device, reused by Lazzarato, but it is also linked to a whole tradition of representation of financial vampires or of the industrial world depicted as hell, configuring what I will here call 'gothic capitalism'.

Both groups present aesthetic similarities, but diverse uses [5]. In both cases, cruelty, the horror of a past time, burst into the present in the form of memories or warnings. These are images that address not so much the looking or contemplating, as to the sensing in one's flesh. It is possibly this bodily quality that makes them memorable and apt for the referred mnemotechnics. The representations refer us to myths and symbols of the past, sometimes re-elaborated. In any case, they make an imaginary text that shows today the cruelty of the past and uncovers "how much trouble people went to in order to triumph over forgetfulness" (Nietzsche, 1887: 89).

Indebted man

Typing "debt" in an image web browser – like *Google* or *Bing*– allows us to get a first glance of many of the images on which the debt is constructed in the present. Still, it is true that search engines, far from being innocent tools, project our desires back on us; they give us the results that – by our browsing history, geographical location, preferred language, or even by our private messages – they know we may want to find. Anyhow, a massive search returns, from a variety of contexts, a panorama of images that are meaningfully connected through variation and repetition. It is obviously not a statistic fact, but the verification of an evident iteration.

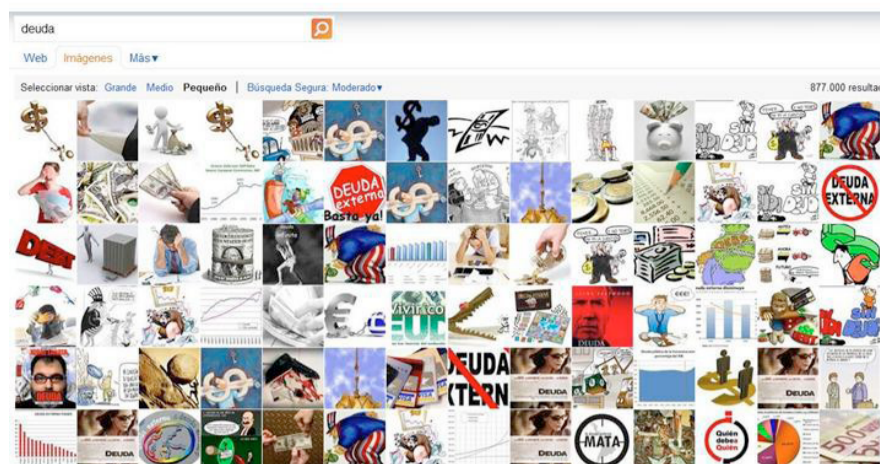


Fig. 1- Screenshot from the results of “debt” with the search engine Bing. The complete references of each of the images can be consulted at the end of the article.

One of the aspects that soon catches our attention is that most of the results present us an isolated debtor, and not a group. Even though debt is usually supported by a group – State, community, family... – we see a lonely individual. This singularity could respond to formal criteria, but it also evokes exactly what capitalism demands and compels in the current crisis. In other words: to “*take upon oneself* the costs and risks externalized by the State and corporations” (Lazzarato, 2012: 51) [6].



Fig. 2- Images extracted from the search of ‘debt’ in Bing [see Fig. 1].

To take charge, or take upon oneself is, literally, one of the topics within the modes of representation of the indebted man. Among these images of the indebted subject, we repeatedly see the Titan Atlas, carrying his debt upon his shoulders. We also find a slight variation in which the debtor is represented as Sisyphus, pushing it uphill. [Fig. 2a] In both cases, the sense of infinite punishment, therefore of guilt, is clear. It is not by chance that we find clear visual connections if we search “guilt” in the same engines. The presence of the shackles among the images of debt emphasises the offence, and the debtor, as the guilty one, is punished, seized by debt. In some cases, debt is also identified with money, by means of added symbols (€ or \$). [Fig. 3]



Fig. 3 - Images extracted from the search of 'debt' in *Bing* [see Fig. 1].

The promise may not guarantee the repayment – as Lazzarato says –, but the insistence on the consequences, by way of images, may possibly help. The terror provoked by the execution, but maybe even more its evocation, belong to the repertoire of techniques that guarantee the reimbursement. A promise is not enough and the cr [7].

The performative utterance of the promise, if it is to perform rather than describe the act of promising, is not in itself the repayment of the debt. The promise is no doubt a 'speech act', but humanity produces a multiplicity of techniques, all 'scarier and more sinister' from one to next, in order to ensure that the performative does not remain mere speech, a *flatus vocis*. (Lazzarato, 2011: 40)

More than a commitment by word, debt is a burden. It exerts a real force over the individual's body and shapes him. The message is clear: the sight of that load awakens/reminds corporal sensations; it is felt on the back. We must not understand the image of the burden of debt as a metaphor, but as a consequence, because debt demands a real effort, not repaying it demands a punishment, and the individual is bound or subjected by it. The repetition, in different versions and media, makes us think of a common work in which the debt-guilt-body punishment is rooted. If we attend to Nietzsche, it is a sentence that runs through generations up to the foundational brutality of the initial debt. In Lazzarato's words, "debt involves a process of subjectivation that marks at once 'body' and 'spirit'" (Lazzarato, 2011: 42).



Fig. 4 - Images extracted from the search of 'debt' in *Bing* [see Fig. 1].

Images such as the Titan Atlas show us how easily the same motif can take part in opposed narratives within the same context, in this case, of debt. The image of a weak individual about to crack under the inscription 'infinte debt' [Fig. 4c] is not the same as the Atlas sculpture by Lee Lawrie in the midst of the Rockefeller Center in New York. [Fig. 5] The exaggerated musculature and the specific site of the latter are telling a different story of an heroic capitalism. Besides the context, words fulfil a directive and restrictive task, to control what the image says only what it is intended to say. [Figs. 3b and 3c]



Fig. 5 - Atlas, Lee Lawrie, 1937, Rockefeller Center. From Wikipedia. Author: Michael Greene (CC BY 2.0).



Fig. 6- Images included in the exhibition catalogue *Atlas ¿Cómo llevar el mundo a cuestras? [Atlas, How to carry the world on one's back?]* (2010): *El porteador* (1812-1823), by F. de Goya, and *Albañil* (1928), by A. Sander.

In the exhibition catalogue *Atlas. How to carry the world on one's back?*, Didi-Huberman (2010: 14) said that the Atlas is a visual form of knowledge. In the same exhibition he also suggested that the images themselves constitute the load. A burden in the shape of a globe or a bundle, but also as a tension generated in the individual; between the images of horror that haunt him and what is happening on the desk. Therefore, “how to carry the world on one's back?” is also a practical question: how to uphold them? Images weigh the individual down, bound him, oppressing-depressing him over the desk, and on the shoulders at the workplace. [Fig. 8]

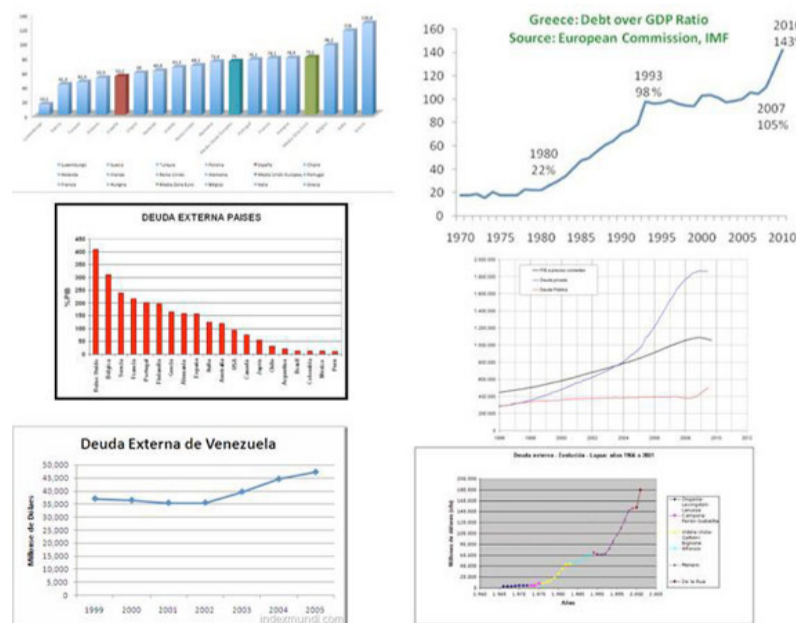


Fig. 7 - Images extracted from the search of 'debt' in Bing [see Fig. 1].

The weight of the load is not only a burden on the shoulders; it is also an intellectual load, on the head. A force exerted by balance sheets, numbers and financial statements that make up another cluster of the images of debt. [Fig. 7] Images that, without a code or appropriate training, are only hieroglyphics or, using Marx's expression referring to the occult nature of the commodities, "a social hieroglyphic" [8].



Fig. 8 - Images extracted from the search of 'debt' in *Bing* [see Fig. 1].



Fig. 9 - Melancholy (1514), by A. Dürer. Quoted in Buck-Morss, 1989, p. 377.

Fig. 10- Capricho 43, El sueño de la razón (1798), by F. Goya.

Memory acquires thus a physical dimension and a work that the exhibition had already shown. The importance of the table when it came to arrange and make sense of the images was also highlighted, "tables to collect the scattered pieces of the word" (Didi-Huberman, 2011: 36). It is precisely on these tables where the balance and financial sheets are placed, the space where the efforts are made to solve the social hieroglyphic, but also the place of frustrations and uncertainty. [Figs. 8-12]



Fig. 11- Cartoon by El Roto published in *El País* (2/10/2012)

Fig. 12- Cartoon by El Roto published in *El País* (11/6/2012)

[11: “The sleep of the nation produces exiles”. 12: “The crisis is making me lose meditative power”.]

The weight over the back or in the suitcase, the worries over the head and the numbers on the desk draw the familiar picture of the indebted individual. It is a visual example of frustration and worries that goes far back in the past. Here, depression (formerly known as melancholy) attains its full economic-pathologic sense, its *pesar* [9] [10]. The impossible maths, the worries that reason cannot settle, or that reason itself has generated, that binds him to the desk and crushes him in silence (at least that is what some would like to happen). The image of debt appears in the imaginary as an individual burden, insisting on the idea that one must take the consequences upon oneself; nevertheless, the debt “cuts across the whole society, and calls for new solidarities and new cooperation” (Lazzarato, 2011, p. 162). What can images do, or what have they done in this respect?



Fig. 13- The Dream I (1797), by F. de Goya.

Fig. 14- The Vampire (1886), by Walter Crane.

Gothic capitalism

The images of cruelty can ease the mnemotechnic process, reminding the individual of his condition of debtor-guilty and, as a consequence, securing his promises. But the mnemotechnics of cruelty are not limited to debt. There are many examples of horror images used to intimidate and maintain the *statu quo*. Images of debt are part of that repertoire, but the same horror images have a power to impress that can be exerted in the opposite direction. Here I am not only talking about the indebted subject, but about the use of art-horror images, in the opposite sense, as a part of a progressive – or simply liberating – machinery. Many counterexamples show us that the “horrific imagery can be, and has been, used in the service of politically progressive themes within given social contexts” (Carroll, 1990, p. 198).

In answer to the neoliberal machinery for producing subjects and to the role of images as part of that construction, we find the use of horror imagery with a liberating intention. Lazzarato engages with this tradition, using Kafka’s device to highlight the uncanny mechanism behind debt. But he is also preceded by others like Walter Benjamin, for whom “hell names reality directly” (Buck-Morss, 1989, p. 121), or Marx before him, who usually resorted to gothic horror images on his writings (Baldick, 1987). Images used to denounce the excesses and abuses of capitalism and the modern world, shape in this fashion what I have called gothic capitalism.



Fig. 15- Shot from Blade Runner (1982), by Ridley Scott.

A precursor to recent cinematic dystopias, such as *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982), can be found in the images of gothic capitalism present in the engravings by Walter Crane, one of the artists that has better illustrated the monsters described by Marx. In prints like *Mrs. Grundy Frightened at her own Shadow* (1886) and others included in the series *Cartoons for the Cause* (1896) [Fig. 16], the industrial world is plainly represented as hell. In *Mrs. Grundy*, from each of Cerberus’ vigilant heads hangs a sign with a legend: “Production for benefit”, “Factory System” and “Competition” In this example, the load, identified with land, capital and benefits, law and order, etc. is carried by Mrs. Grundy, who does not want to get rid of it, despite the offer of an unemployed person/man: “Let me help with some O’tthose Ma’am”. Mrs. Grundy gets scared of her own shadow, a shadow in which the shape of a bourgeois hat is transformed in the Phrygian cap, a symbol of the past Revolution taken from the Roman Republic.



Fig. 16- *The Strong Man*, *Mrs. Grundy Frightened at her own Shadow* and an untitled engraving included in Walter Crane's *Cartoons for the Cause* (1896).

The images of gothic capitalism and their inhabitant monsters share a reality that is traumatic for many, a daily hell that is easier to communicate through horror. Far from what one may think, horror images do not lead us away from reality, but can delve deeper in it or can help to cope with it. This is possible even with fiction images, or maybe even more so with them. In *Images of Fear* (1990), Martin Tropp has pointed out how the British soldiers destined to the continental front during World War II described and identify their experiences in terms drawn from gothic novels. He asserts “the inexpressible and private becomes understandable and communal, share and safe” (Tropp, 1990, p. 5) [11]. Obviously, crossing the English Channel on the way to the trenches is a completely different context than being evicted from your house, but the mechanism by which gothic horror images allow the individual to express fear and unspeakable violence is common in both instances.

Known images, be they from gothic fiction or past history, can help us to cope with the present, especially in times of crisis or important changes [12]. Marx observed the fundamental role of the images that conjured up symbols and myths from antiquity in moments of radical historical change (Buck-Morss, 1989, p. 141). For instance, he referred to the Roman Republic clothing – specifically, to the Phrygian cap associated to the revolution, as seen in Walter Crane's engravings – and he said so precisely in the *18th Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*, where he himself evoked horror by means of fiction and past terror. The comparison of the vampire with capital is very well known (Marx, 1867, Chapter 10 Section 1) [13], and it is also present in Walter Crane's illustration [Fig. 14], and in the use of the spectre at the beginning of the Communist Manifesto (Marx & Engels, 1848, Preface), but it is not so much an image in which Marx associates the lackey vampire with the real power in his *18th of Brumaire*; capital is here the alchemist with the ability to change, by means of magic, cheap work force into gold.

The bourgeois social order, which, at the beginning of the century, placed the State as a sentinel before the newly instituted allotment, and that manured this with laurels, has become a vampire that sucks out its heart-blood and its very brain, and throws it into the alchemist's pot of capital. (Marx 1852: 345)

An important share of the power of capital lies within the magic of transformation, changes only comparable with the monsters that inhabit a gothic world of fiction. Joan Brossa's *Vampir* (1989) [Fig. 17], in which we see a vampire bat

coming out of a hat over a background of a mortgage text, works also in this sense – magic, horror and debt – and, at the same time, speaks of the transformative power of images: a power of simplification, a collage, that can help to take in an increasingly dispersed world. Images of gothic horror and cruelty synthesise the heterogeneous experience of capitalism. They simplify and facilitate its assimilation, although it is clear that they can easily fall into Manichaeism [14].



Fig. 17- *Vampir*, by Joan Brossa. Included in *Brossa y la magia* (Brossa and magic).

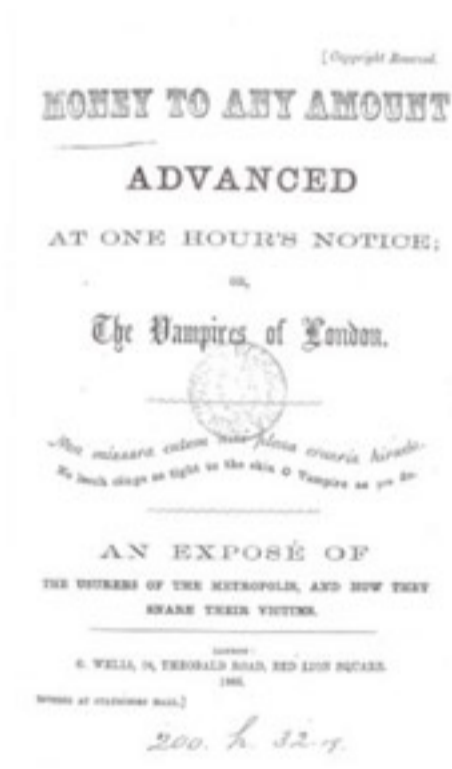


Fig. 18- *Money to any Amount advanced at one hour's notice; or, The Vampires of London* (1865), by Captain J. Colborne.

Buck-Morss' words about Walter Benjamin's use of images, could be extrapolated to the question we approach here. It is about "inner-historical images [sometimes from fiction, we could add] that juxtapose the original, utopian potential of the modern (in which the archaic, mythic elements have found nonmythical, historical content) and its catastrophic and barbaric present reality. It relies on the shock of these juxtaposed images to compel revolutionary awakening." (Buck-Morss, 1989: 251).

As we have seen, Marx made extensive use of the repertoire of gothic images – vampires, alchemist or ghosts – to confront “the barbaric and catastrophic reality of the present”, but the intellectual elite was not alone in perusing that vocabulary. In various media, from the 18th century onwards, we find the same uses. For instance, about the same date the *Capital* was published (1867), was issued a text titled *Money to Any Amount Advanced at One Hour’s Notice; or, The Vampires of London* (1865). [Fig. 18] This pamphlet denounced the abusive practices of London Jewish moneylenders. His author, Captain John Colborne, was brought to court, but the judge dismissed the complaint. Based on the image of moneylenders as vampires, the text does not skimp on insults, comparing the moneylenders also with vultures, jackals, and other stereotypes of the evil Jew as Barrabas, Cain or Judas and, of course, Shylock and his pound of flesh (Lucendo, 2009: 431-438)

Over time, horror fiction has demonstrated that it can provide suitable tools to denounce, assimilate and communicate certain kinds of experiences and relations that would be hard to express otherwise. In some cases, art-horror fulfills a didactic purpose, as in Walter Crane’s *The Vampire* (1886) or in the pamphlet *The Vampires of London*. Both use the figure of the vampire to show that the line between literary fiction and political fact was very thin (Buck-Morss, 1989, p. 161). But this phenomenon is not limited to the 19th century. Already in the 18th century, when the gothic novel appeared contemporarily to the *Encyclopédie*, the Enlightenment used horror fiction images to denounce the abuses of political and economic power (Lucendo, 2009: 414-419). Voltaire, for example, linked the dubious news about the existence of vampires to the real threat: “these true suckers lived not in cemeteries, but in very agreeable palaces” (1764). Another less known example, but even more symptomatic, is the editorial published by Caleb D’Anvers in *The Craftsman* in 1732, where the author compares the emerging phenomenon of the vampires with one of the first financial scandals in the history of capitalism, known by the name of South Sea Bubble [15].

If, along the 17th and 19th centuries, we find numerous cases where the fictional monster is used as a political weapon, along the 20th and the 21st, things have not changed so far or, in any case, they have strengthened. To conclude, we will look at some recent examples to show how horror images are still effective; in this case, in the context of debt.



Fig. 19- Goldman Sucks.

Fig. 20- Front cover, La bola de cristal.

Fig. 21- BBK mortgage, Internet, Frito.

¿Conclusions?

It is difficult to establish any kind of conclusions concerning a certain kind of images and its uses, that are still so valid in the present and in constant change and generation. A proliferation of zombies, vampires, and werewolves still populates everyday life. Fictions inherited from gothic horror are constantly produced, of which we can make more or less political readings, as the case may be. On the other hand, reality keeps sending back those same images in the form of news programmes and reports, cases of corruption or financial scandals. Horror fictions and real horrors resemble each other and are frequently mistaken, as happened in the 19th century feuilletons. In this world, Kafka's device and all the cruelties described in gothic novels return to help us digest it.

Gothic narrative has been related, from its inception, with the transgression of limits (vital, moral, etc.), and that is maybe the reason why its images travel so easily between reality and fiction. Not only do we find traces of political reality behind gothic novels –such as the French Revolution alluded to in Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796) (Ellis, 2000: 96-101) –; also political criticism – as we have seen – has used art-horror forms to denounce real abuses and real violence. Cases like Lazzarato's in the context of debt, and, above all, Marx before him, are good examples of the construction of gothic capitalism.

The coincidence in time of the rise of the gothic novel and the publication of Diderot and D'Alembert's *Encyclopédie*, but also of the development of industrialization – the basis of modern capitalism and the workers' movement – are structural coincidences that demand further research. Far from being an isolated exercise in style the bond between debt and art-horror images it is linked to their genesis.

In 410 BC, certain tribes from northern and eastern lands of Europe assaulted Rome. A real fear has, since then, made the term 'Gothic' a synonym of barbaric (Davenport-Hines 1998, p. 1). Later, the same word was used to name a medieval and fantasy horror that seemed a thing of the past. Today, the gothic imaginary is as alive as then and, far from settling within the confines of history or fiction, we now speak of a gothic culture or gothic aesthetics present in art, fashion and even in politics and economy.

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List of images

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- 1 Screenshot from the results of the search for “debt” with the search engine Bing: www.bing.com (accesed June 2012).
- 2 Image extracted from the search of “debt” in Bing [see Fig. 1] (accesed June 2012) found in the following sites:
 - a) <http://guillermohita.blogspot.com.es/2012/03/deuda-conocida-del-ayuntamiento-de.html>
 - b) <http://www.eleconomista.es/mercados-cotizaciones/noticias/211168/05/07/La-crisis-inmobiliaria-hace-temblar-a-las-constructoras-FCC-y-Sacyr-pierden-un-10.html>
 - c) <http://tansoloesmiopinion.blogspot.com.es/2011/08/la-deuda-pero-que-bonita-esta-mi-ceuta.html>
 - d) <http://www.finanzas.com/crisis-de-deuda>
- 3 Image extracted from the search of “debt” in Bing [see Fig. 1] (accesed June 2012) found in the following sites:
 - a) <http://www.peatom.info/negocios/119874/la-cadena-de-la-deuda-puede-estallar/>
 - b) <http://izasjon.blogspot.com.es/2010/09/la-deuda-subio-especialmente-> <http://www.rankia.com/blog/buenos-fundamentos/829053-nadie-sabe-que-hacer-deuda-griega>

- d) <http://www.exito-motivacion-y-superacionpersonal.com/image-files/esclavitud-deuda.jpg>
- 4 Image extracted from the search of “debt” in Bing [see Fig. 1] (accessed June 2012) found in the following sites:
- a) <http://www.estofa.es/images/stories/economia/mucha-deuda.gif>
- b) <http://crisisynegocio.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/Deuda.jpg>
- c) <http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-ZE6EsXPpFzc/TZsUdHEHabl/AAAAAAAAAmk/Yc1AJ1Lxx00/s1600/deuda1.jpg>
- d) <http://pagartodaslasdeudas.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/salir-de-deudas1.jpg>
- 5 Atlas, Lee Lawrie, 1937, Rockefeller Center. Source: Wikipedia. Author: Michael Greene (CC BY 2.0).
- 6 Images included in the exhibition catalogue Atlas ¿Cómo llevar el mundo a cuestas? (2010): El porteador (1812-1823), by F. de Goya and Albañil (1928), by A. Sander.
- 7 Image extracted from the search of “debt” in Bing [see Fig. 1] (accessed June 2012) found in the following sites:
- a) <http://www.deudaexterna.es/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/Deuda-P%C3%BAblica.jpg>
- b) <http://www.planeatusfinanzas.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/deuda-griega.png>
- c) <http://2.bp.blogspot.com/-pggvkux7WLQ/TgaXHk8q6tI/AAAAAAAAAhE/IWnwlpdJnew/s1600/Deuda+externa.jpg>
- d) <http://porantonomasia.files.wordpress.com/2010/05/deuda-publica.jpg>
- e) <http://www.indexmundi.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2009/06/image-thumb4.png>
- f) http://www.quiendebea quien.org/IMG/jpg_deuda_externa_argentina_66-01.jpg
- 8 Image extracted from the search of “debt” in Bing [see Fig. 1] (accessed June 2012) found in the following sites:
- a) <http://www.comoahorrar.es/la-deuda-no-es-un-instrumento-de-prosperidad/>
- b) http://humanquality.files.wordpress.com/2010/09/reunificacion_de_deudas_hipotecas.jpg
- c) <http://consumeverde.files.wordpress.com/2008/07/deuda.jpg>
- d) <http://www.economiasimple.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/Pagar-las-viejas-deudas.jpg>
- e) <http://finanzasinteligentes.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/deudas.jpg>
- f) http://4.bp.blogspot.com/_BY_-f_YXc14/S226ASqnO8I/AAAAAAAAA70/cRp_Sy0L8Bg/s400/aplazamiento+deuda.gif
- 9 Capricho 43, El sueño de la razón, F. Goya
- 10 Melancholy, by A. Dürero.
- 11 Cartoon by El Roto published in El País (2/10/2012)
- 12 Cartoon by El Roto published in El País (11/6/2012)
- 13 El sueño I (1797), by F. de Goya.
- 14 The Vampire by Walter Crane, 1886.
- 15 Shot from Blade Runner (1982), by Ridley Scott.
- 16 The Strong Man, by Walter Crane, in Cartoons for the Cause.
- 17 Mrs. Grundy Frightened at her own Shadow (1886), by Walter Crane.
- 18 Untitled, by Walter Crane, in Cartoons for the Cause.
- 19 Vampir, Joan Brossa. In Brossa y la magia.
- 20 Frontcover of The Vampires of London.
- 21 Goldman Sucks
- 22 Frontcover of La bola de cristal.
- 23 BBK Mortgage, Internet, Frito.

Footnotes

[1] In *The Merchant of Venice* (1596-97), Shylock says: “in a merry sport, if you repay me not on such a day in such a place, such a sum or sums as are expressed in the condition, let the forfeit be nominated for an equal pound of your fair flesh to be cut off and taken in what part of your body pleaseth me” (p. 130)

[2] The quotations are taken from the edition in English, although my the first reading of the chapter devoted to Nietzsche in Spanish was thanks to the excellent and unpublished translation by Natalia Ruiz, from the original in French.

[3] “Everyone is a ‘debtor’, accountable to and guilty before capital. Capital has become the Great Creditor, the Universal creditor” (p. 7).

[4] This is precisely how I understand Ernst Van Alphen’s expression ‘Shock into Thought’ stated in *Art in Mind. How Contemporary Images Shape Thought* (2005), that could embrace more particular mnemotechnics of cruelty.

[5] Even though we highlight two opposed movements, we also find images which sense is hard to determine. Threat or denouncement? Exemplary punishment or an example of resistance? The images of an eviction can be the threat of the consequences of failing to repay a debt, but its refusal and the success of some of the collective strategies, can also be models of resistance.

[6] Emphasis on the original.

[7] editor “require[s] tangible and intangible collateral” (Lazzarato, 2011: 41) At present, we often see in the media the consequences of debt default. For example, the use of violence in the evictions reminds spectators of what could happen if debt is not paid back. Despite this, through the same images, we see an increasing number of instances of resistance that work in the opposite direction.

[8] An expression used by Marx in the context of the fetishism of commodity: “Value, therefore, does not stalk about with a label describing what it is. It is its value, rather, that converts every product into a social hieroglyphic. Later on, we try to decipher the hieroglyphic, to get behind the secret of our own social products” (Marx, 1867: 39).

[9] In Spanish, *pesar* (n., sorrow) has also another meaning (v., to weigh).

[10] If we carry out the same online search experiment with the word “depression”, we will find several elements in common with “debt” and its weight.

[11] “Horror fiction gives the reader the tools to ‘read’ experiences that would otherwise, like nightmares, be incommunicable. In that way the inexpressible and private becomes understandable and communal, shared and safe” (Tropp, p. 5). “The elements of horror fiction had always been mirrored in the lives around its readers; until the mass trauma of the war, that mirror had been clouded in supernatural fantasy and sublime speculation. On the Western Front, the mirror became a window on day to day experience, etched with the imagery and words of Gothic terror” (Tropp, 1990).

[12] The coincidence between important cycles of horror movies in moments of crisis has been mentioned repeatedly. For example, the case of the German fantastic cinema of the 20s or of the universal horror movies of the 30s.

[13] “Capital is dead labour, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks. The time during which the labourer works, is the time during which the capitalist consumes the labour-power he has purchased of him” (Marx, 1867, Chapter 10 Section 1) (Accessed December 18, 2012.)

[14] It is not difficult to guess that the process of monsterization and an intense personalised hatred may lead to dangerous situations connected to mechanisms like that of the scapegoat. Hence, the need of a temporary masking. Hannah Arendt pointed out some of the consequences in *The origins of Totalitarianism* (1958: 37):

It is not difficult to comprehend that a man who put his money solely and directly to the use of begetting more money can be hated more bitterly than the one who gets his profit through a lengthy and involved process of production. Since at that time nobody asked for credit if he could possibly help it (...) bankers looked like the exploiters not of working power and productive capacity, but of misfortune and misery.

[15] This happens the same year that the word ‘vampire’ appeared for the first time. Over Caleb D’Anvers’ article (Lucendo, 2009, p. 410) and the articles reproduction on the appendix. About its importance and significance in relation to the South Sea Bubble and the role of mass media in the rising of the vampire the text of the conference “El vampiro en la época de su reproductividad técnica” read at the Universidad de Granada on April 18, 2012, in the course *Vampiros a contraluz* (publication forthcoming)