# Imaginary Warrants of Human Capital
## Approaches to the money-image relationship
By Teresa Arozena

Time, space and money are the interwoven resources of social power. From this approach, the history of social change is widely dependent on the flow of the concepts of time and space, and the ideological purposes for which they have been wielded. For this reason, insofar as art is essentially a mechanism for space-time production, it is not possible to consider it outside politics, much less to eliminate its aesthetic aspects from the political arena.

Historically, art has provided the backbone for the symbolic representation of space. Moreover, in the 20th century, art embraced the innovative project of representing time. The advent of the technical image (technically produced and reproduced) would be a deciding factor in this juncture; the new and powerful visual precision tool would be placed at the heart of the modern project, thus helping to experience, measure and account for life in its entirety. In this programme of world 'striation', the mediation of techno-visuality would be fundamental in attaining a complete dominion and control over temporal magnitude.

The need to rationalise and fully administer time responds to a capitalist logic based on the clear association: "time is money". The phrase is attributed to Benjamin Franklin—that gentleman who today stares back at us from a 100 dollar bill—and sums up the new "economy of time". Time is money, or, in other words, "moments" are "the elements of profit"; they are capital gains. To the extent that, within the framework of mass culture that flourished in the 20th century, we might agree with Deleuze and say that what defines the technical image (and industrial art deriving from it, particularly achieved through movement-images and cinema) is not so much mechanical reproducibility but the now internal relationship between image and money.

*1. The ultimate road movie*

"Imaginary warrants of human capital" was the expression used by L'Herbier[1] and quoted by Deleuze to express the way in which cinema "buys" space and time in the modern world where both of these elements are becoming increasingly expensive. According to Deleuze, "Money is the obverse of all the images that the cinema shows and sets in place so that films about money are already, if implicitly, films within the film or about the film".[2]

Although this analysis focused on the intrinsic problems of cinema, revealing the impossibility of camera-time equivalence (since time is money or money in circulation),

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[1] The title is taken from a lecture by L'Herbier, "Le cinématographe et l'espace, chronique financière". *Cit*. Gilles Deleuze, *La imagen-tiempo. Estudios sobre cine 2* (The Time Image. Cinema 2), Paidós Comunicación, Barcelona, 1996, p. 110. *Cfr*. Noël Burch, *Marcel L' Herbier, (Cinéma d'aujourd'hui: 78)*, Seghers, 1973, pp. 97-104.
[2] Gilles Deleuze, *Ibid*, p. 108.

the notion of money as an internal budget of image can easily be extrapolated to the field of semio-capitalist visuality. This form of time-image that took root in cinema as international industrial art has expanded and become an everyday feature, constantly being updated all over the globe and appearing on all those screens that have populated the world in just half a century.

*Until the end of the world* proclaimed the title of Wim Wenders' (1991)[3] unusual and apocalyptic film, described by the director as "the ultimate road movie". Today these devices reach the four corners of the earth, scattering light-images over the world, their high power of suggestion growing alongside their capacity to gobble up reality. The lucidity of Wenders' approach in the early 90s consisted of using a formula of near-futurism (the film took place in the symbolic year of 1999) to reflect the effects of capitalist time-space compression; the depletion of space and compression of time on a hypnotic screen that causes disquiet by its seeming power to possess something that is apparently expiring. These 'warrants' of the first human capital, time and space, now definitely belong to the sphere of the imaginary. The world has become cinema and television while globalization has been underway. The flow of images that circulate in an ever-growing proliferation of systems of mediations and image broadcasting devices implicitly express the global process of capitalist circulation, their cyclical form based on an unsustainable, disjointing and catastrophic rise.

The journey has become impossible; as Deleuze says, "the journey is television". The ultimate road movie has already been filmed; the cinematographic genre given over to the representation of space is completely spent. In several places, Paul Virilio analyses the contemporary effects of the perceptive transformation recounted in Wenders' film under the idea of the world as "a unity of place". After losing the horizon of the geographical perspective, the light-image and its new active (wave) optics have thoroughly replaced the passive optics of Galileo's era.[4] The screen is the new 'artificial horizon' that announces the preponderance of the media perspective over the immediate perspective of space. The relief of the tele-present event takes priority over the slow and outmoded three dimensions of things and places. Space is compressed: perspective is now immersive, allowing insufficient distance for a 'view from outside'. A new enveloping space opens up all around that is no longer optical but 'tactile', immersive and oceanic, in the Benjaminian sense.

The 'matrix hypothesis' is appropriate for the visual regime of the screen, where space seems to liquefy, as though coming to express the desire to return to the womb. Submerged and enveloped in the tissue of a 'matrix-image', time appears to play the leading role. But the duration we are given and the time circulating there is also compressed and inhuman—a capitalist time. Troubled by chronic inflation, it is continuously played back in ubiquitous, flowing images, whose opaque flipside is none other than money, with its asymmetrical, maddening logic.

The ultimate road movie ends on an island; it could be no other way. Wenders' main characters take refuge in a totally remote retreat, a laboratory in the middle of a desert; they withdraw, fleeing from a phantom unleashed, wresting themselves from a world in

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[3] *Bis ans Ende der Welt (Until the end of the world)*, 1991, Wim Wenders, colour, 280 min. Co-production: Germany, France, Australia. Argos Films, Road Movies Filmproduktion, Village Roadshow Pictures and Warner Bros Pictures.

[4] Paul Virilio, *La bomba informática* (The Information Bomb). Cátedra, Madrid, 1999.

collapse, in what may be the trivial and unstable, final fortress of reality. Even in this place they discover they cannot escape the influx of phantoms on the screen.

Here they discover that reality has definitively been swallowed up by the images, leaving no more than a devastated desert or an inhospitable ocean. The world rendered an island after the shipwreck of the future; a direct flight to a horizon of water, in the fading light; becoming an experiment, or a laboratory where to begin all over again. This imaginary limit is inhibited desire, the mythical matrix of any social body.


*2. The imaginary limit (death on screen)*

And yet surely money is merely (or nothing less than) a common exchange system, a means or a chain—a vehicle for value, or a way of measuring, prioritising and encoding this. Money can thus be considered a dimension of cognition. Its function is largely to symbolise a certain limit and a certain lack; it is a reminder of finitude and death. For this reason the close ties that link money and temporal magnitude are elemental. If death is the backdrop of time and its passing, the clear equivalence created between money and time during modernity coincides with the total social exclusion of ritual forms of death, and the subsequent elimination of the capacity to impose limitation on the social body.

Indeed, 'the crisis of death' first appears in the cultural context marked by the advent of techno-visuality. And the profound "anthropological place of Death and of the new image"[5] responds to the disappearance of the ceremonialism of death in modern society, and with it the loss of the substance that fuelled the common narrative fabric, as well as the traditional mechanisms of memory.

Walter Benjamin had already talked of this; an idea of eternity, the notion of the monument and this form of registering memory deserted us, along with archaic narrative forms.[6] Death, as a social event invested with ritual value, was ousted from daily life, creating remote prophylactic spaces and hedonistic discourses of supposed 'eternal youth' where old age became laughable.

However, Death would not be banished, taking refuge instead in the new image. Housed in techno-visuality, it updated its relationship with narrative models and new capitalist conceptions of time and its finitude.

According to Pierre Lévy, when we face limitation, money confronts us with the interdependent problematic of value, choice and freedom; that is, it plays an important part in our construction of meaning: "The spirit is only free in the face of death. In the collective intelligence, money updates this freedom and this mortality". But through investment, continues Lévy further on: "Money is equally important for opening up to the future and to the other, to fecund energy, excitement and risk".[7] Economic libido, psychic energy put into circulation.

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[5] Roland Barthes, *La cámara lúcida. Nota sobre la fotografía* (Camera Lucida. Reflections on Photography), pp. 160-161.

[6] Walter Benjamin, "El narrador", *Para una crítica de la violencia y otros ensayos. Iluminaciones IV*, (A Critique of Violence and Other Essays), Taurus, Madrid, 1998, p. 134.

[7] Pierre Lévy, *El anillo de oro. Inteligencia colectiva y propiedad intelectual* (Collective intelligence: mankind's emerging world in cyberspace). Multitudes, no. 5, May 2001. Spanish trans.: Beñat Balaza.

Nevertheless, it is also patently obvious that money is the codification that leads to deficiency in desire. In capitalism, finiteness or emptiness, the wealth contained in the notion of death is transformed into deprivation, insufficiency of being and debt of existence.

On being displaced, the cultural notion of death was transformed and a particular idea of time closely bound up with it seemed to fade: eternity. The opposite of scarcity, this notion was left totally truncated and distorted. In modern life, according to Benjamin "everything could be abbreviated".[8] Existence became transitory, changeable and flowing. Like the markets—and as Bauman has made us realise—the metaphor of 'liquidity' became the image that best reflected society.

Impoverished, Death became a mere shadow, while contemporary humanity was consummated in the 'here and now', the speed and fluidity of which increased in line with the growth of money and its warped eternity, the distorted logic of something that has no end.

The 'time-money chain' behind the image will always be a limitation. But it will be the very frontier of a schizophrenic capitalist logic, as defined by Deleuze and Guattari, an unattainable limit that leans towards the infinite.[9] An 'imaginary limit', always displaced, systematically seeking 'to go further', escaping from the self to impede its own end from within.

Perhaps the road movie is the most elemental genre of cinema, since it transfers the perpetual movement of flight into images.[10] Displacement to infinity, 'endless tendency', where the gaze becomes covetous in a flowing reality. In its infinite greed and false effects of frontier, everything begins over and over again. In this genre the world reveals itself in its capitalist essence—'have car, will travel'—and space opens up in an endless series of possibilities, in an eternal new opportunity,[11] that feeds back to the repetitive machine.

In the ultimate road movie, the perpetually displaced imaginary frontier collapses under the real limit imposed by the depletion of space: a nuclear disaster puts an end to everything, devastating the air, light, space and time. "How can this nightmare be imagined?" Deleuze would say, "…the invasion of the socius by noncoded flows that move like lava? An irrepressible wave of shit, as in the Fourbe myth".[12] The sea pouring over the earth, corpses like barren islands floating in the ocean. Tenaciously holding onto the sedimented layers of images that still make up its fragile stratigraphy.

*3. Images in use. Visuality in the regime of the electronic screen*

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Bilioweb [online]. World Wide Web Document, URL:<http://sindominio.net/biblioweb/telematica/levy.html#tex2html> [consulta: 28-03-2011].

[8] Walter Benjamin, *Op. cit.*, p. 120

[9] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *El Antiedipo (Capitalismo y esquizofrenia, I)* (Anti-Oedipus: capitalism and schizophrenia)*,* Paidós (new extended edition), Barcelona, 1985, p. 183.

[10] Paul Virilio, *La bomba informática* (The Information Bomb) Cátedra, Madrid 1999.

[11] Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernidad líquida* (Liquid Modernity), Editorial Fondo de Cultura Económica, México DF, 2004, pp. 65-69.

[12] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Op. Cit.*

The screen is a device that is as much physical and technical as symbolic and political. Through it the image should be understood as a specific form of existence, a construct that belongs to the fabric of life and to the order of habit. Indeed, we inhabit images and they too inhabit us; just like a Russian doll, a game of contents and containers, a machine of echoes and reflections; the energy of the images, their effects and affections seem to pass through us and lodge inside our psychic lives.

A decanting of intensities, a phantasmal tangle. Everything is a process that produces one inside the other—images and subjects. Paul Valéry had already announced this transformation in 1928, in a famously premonitory text, *The Conquest of Ubiquity*.[13] Valéry clearly comprehends the decisive and imminent modification of the idea of art and the relationship between subject and image. The conception of "a sensitive reality delivered to your door", of a circulatory, distributive and home-based condition, not only of the product of artistic experience but also of 'all experience' in general, anticipated our current collective and connective imaginary. In the post-industrial era, an object-based commercial economy swings towards one based on distribution. Something that Valéry intuited as prodigious and a step forward for humanity is an essential part of the current socio-economic organisation of the information or 'network society' where dematerialised information networks transform the material basis of our experience, as Manuel Castells has pointed out.[14]

The world has been peopled by bodiless images, 'obscene' apparitions—literally 'off scene'. Rather than objects of contemplation or expectation, they have become 'objects in use', beyond the spectacle; the images pierce us, settle into our homes and furnish our ideas, addressing us from our own body.

In electronic capitalism, this 'tactile route' of the visual, which is the 'route in use', is an everyday reality whose effective realisation is found on the horizon where all the screens that surround us converge—systems of image diffusion feeding into the electronic screens that vehemently burgeon in our midst. All the means capable of generating simultaneous and collective reception—from TVs to mobiles, from the Internet to portable consoles or car video systems—to constantly update an enveloping 'matrix-image' installed in the fabric of our lives.

The socio-economic and cultural implications of the 'network society' and its immersive imaginary are enormous. An extremely important phenomenon occurs in the field of production of symbolicity that might be described as a close contemporary alliance between mercantilisation and visuality. Known as 'cultural capitalism', this term adds a qualitative meaning to the designation of 'informational capitalism'.

The hypothesis of money as a constant behind the images and the set of questions concerning the sphere of production of the imaginary in general could not be correctly observed without considering this salient fact and the historical circumstances it supposes. As José Luis Brea recounts, we are witnessing a functional collision of the 'spheres of culture and the economy'; perhaps the sign that most marked the history of

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[13] Paul Valéry, "La Conquista de la Ubicuidad", *Paul Valéry. Piezas sobre arte*, (Pièces sur l'art) (The Conquest of Ubiquity).Visor, Madrid, 1999, pp. 131-132.

[14] Manuel Castells, "La sociedad red", *La era de la Información*, (The Information Age). Vol. 1 Alianza editorial, Madrid, 2001.

humanity in the early 21st century.[15] A redirection of economic, sociological and political concepts is taking place. 'Network space', an efficient distribution tool, looks promisingly capable of devising its own strategies for presentation, distribution and reception, thus releasing an enormous potential for reorganizing 'audiences' as well as a new structuring of 'public space'.

In itself, this 'network space' is a metaphor for 'cultural capitalism', defined as the result of the swing of industrial capitalism, based on goods production, towards immaterial symbolic production: the 'knowledge product'. According to Brea, this movement wholly defines our time; a time that, on the one hand, goes 'from culture to the economy' through the effective consolidation of an increasingly powerful industry of entertainment culture and spectacle. And on the other, 'from the economy to culture', since the economy becomes 'cultural', adopting the very traits of culture and taking on its potential to establish sociality and subjection, and to produce symbolicity.[16] The new movements of subjectivation are now built here; this is where they are transformed and reveal multiple and mutable identity economies.


*4. The problem of universal exchange (or semantic universality)*


Space was conquered and subjugated in the 19th and 20th centuries when the development of transport networks and locomotion meant that bodies could travel and considerable distances could be covered. In the new 'network space', audiovisual information systems have completely banished the notion of distance, making Valéry's dream come true, by establishing the 'miracle of ubiquity'.

Such a miracle projects an unmistakable image: the earth finally appears to have been transformed into a single place—a round, instantaneous whole. The new 'fullness' responds to market forces where money constitutes the omnipresent global code and omnipotent system of universal exchange.

Uniformly the same, consummate, the globalized world is a perfect backdrop for a controlling policy that is merely a fleeting, superficial and unreal means by which a society of isolated individuals, of people passing through, exhibits its nostalgia for certain common values.

And we might ask how to secure an image 'of the Same' forever; how this semantic operation evolves in the sphere of the image. It could only be resolved by using 'edifying symbols' and models of eternity. The play-writing of power and its hegemonic imaginaries systematically recount tales of a distinctive time; singular

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[15] José Luís Brea, *El tercer umbral, Estatuto de las prácticas artísticas en la era del capitalismo cultural* (The third threshold. Statute of artistic practices in the era of cultural capitalism). CENDEAC, Murcia, 2004.

[16] Based on Frederic Jameson's observations about the cultural evolution of capitalism in the post-modern period, and using a denomination taken from chess—counter double bind—, Brea describes the re-orientation in the economic sphere that characterises today's societies. José Luís Brea, "e-cK: [capitalismo cultural electrónico]" (electronic cultural capitalism), *cultura_RAM. Mutaciones de la cultura en la era de su distribución electrónica* (Mutations of culture in the era of electronic distribution), Gedisa Editorial, Barcelona, 2007, p.33.

moments that evoke stasis, apparently wanting to announce a thousand times over the return of the tyranny of 'the Same'.

The principles and pillars of community, the original guardians of the sources of value, must therefore be expressed through the magnitude of gestures, the testimony of pathos and the invocation of a long list of great timeless concepts that always end with the ultimate and transcendent idea of the unveiling of 'hidden beauty' as the guardian of consummate value, the mechanism of the universal bond, of 'religion'—in Lactantius' etymological sense.

Yet beneath this humanist discourse, the creation of a semantic universality based on the image presents a fundamental advantage for the project of global expansion inherent in capitalism. This is perhaps the most pointed and outward aspect revealed through the image by money.

This has been widely analysed by Allan Sekula and in the light of his reading it seems simple to observe how the unquestionable need to map the terrain of the other lies beneath liberal humanist discourse and the banner of a 'universal visual language' as a common bond for humanity.[17] The need to make, in the words of Benjamin, "an Atlas that exercises" is a response to the project of 'a unity of place', the grand programme of global unification under a single system whose priority is to facilitate production and exchange, and ultimately to increase the prosperity of a supra-oligarchy on a global scale.

This use—and abuse—of image could perhaps ironically be called the 'Coca-Cola moment', thereby appealing to the neo-colonial and expansionist undercurrent of the brilliant humanist image of the brand that "adds life". But according to Sekula's reading the name would have an even stronger foundation. The author focuses his critical efforts on Steichen's great visual project, *The Family of Man*. This enormous floating exhibition was co-sponsored by the Coca-Cola Company and established the conditions for liberal humanism in photography, triggering the inaugural moment of the use of the technical image as a cog in the process of global colonisation.[18]

Here image is self-defined as a social tool capable of revealing the fundamental values of humanity and adopting the power to accommodate a universal and transparent language. A twin power alongside money as a global code. This supposed universal visual language appeals to a stage of the primitive prelinguistic being, as well as to a magical and poetic sense of emotions and essences, capable of fostering fraternity across the planet.

At the time Roland Barthes had been highly critical of Steichen's famous project, pointing out the regressive nature of the operation and the old mystification on which the myth of the human 'condition' rests, which provides the core of essentialism within classical humanism—placing nature 'in the background' of history.

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[17] Allan Sekula, "The Traffic in Photographs"*, Art Journal*, vol. 41, n° 1, Photography and the Scholar/Critic. College Art Association, Spring, 1981. Allan Sekula, "Between the Net and the Deep Blue Sea (Rethinking the Traffic in Photographs)", *October* 102, Autumn 2002, MIT Press Journals, Cambridge.

[18] *The Family of Man* was a photographic exhibition curated by Edward Steichen and was his life project. Shown for the first time in 1955 at MoMA, it was a great event in American post-war culture. From its inception, the exhibition was widely circulated and as a result is one of the most visited displays in the world. Different versions have been exhibited in 38 countries and have been visited by over 9 million people.

An Adamism that was to "give to the immobility of the world the alibi of a 'wisdom' and a 'lyricism' which only make the gestures of man look eternal the better to defuse them", according to Barthes.[19] Within the ambiguous myth of a 'human community', pluralism allows us to infer a magical uniqueness of humankind that returns us to an identical essential 'nature' where diversity is barely a formal variant.

The innate 'universality of meaning' is sustained by an operation that standardises and decontextualises in an attempt to wrench each image from within its historical conditions. The motive behind this movement is that of an eminently utilitarian project that aims to impose the language of power of the imperial centres as a normalising discourse either by force or by seduction. The expanding appetites of neo-oligarchical capitalism encounter a perfect scenario in dramatisation of the 'return to the origin' as an apt representation of a regressive desire.


## 5. *The laboratory*

But Eden is already past its sell-by date, and we no longer need it. Images have absolutely never been independent linguistic systems. This assumed autonomy is merely a self-interested myth, the favourite fetish of the most ideological uses of the imaginary. Conversely, 'linguistic turn' in the theory of the image[20] reveals the way in which images greatly depend on discursive conditions, and their meanings are always hybrid constructs, an interdependent game of the iconic and of utterances, contexts and connections that allow for the complexity of semiotic systems to be made visible.

This gives rise to the need to conceptualise all cultural production in terms of language and textuality and to devise a critical theory characteristic of the image, considering it a hybrid construct: never autonomous like language and always located within a text, be it openly or surreptitiously.

Walter Benjamin[21] was the first to point out the importance of that hybrid format, the inevitable complex relation between the photographic image and its utterances. What is at stake here is an idea that we could undoubtedly describe as cinematographic: the power of the montage. What Sergei Eisenstein defined as the tool for focusing the formal semantic tensions within the images themselves. Equipping the image with tension on the basis of 'its relationships'; looking again and attaching memory and a tale to the images, making them flow in order to understand them in their multiple bio-political dimensions.

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[19] Roland Barthes, "La gran familia de los hombres", *Mitologías* (The Great Family of Man. Mythologies) Siglo XXI, Madrid, 1980, p. 106.

[20] Martin Jay describes how the American reception of structuralism in the late sixties—Saussure, Levi-Strauss and early Barthes—brought the need to conceptualise all cultural production in terms of language and textuality. That is, everything could be treated as a system of signs based on arbitrary meanings, whose skill at bearing meaning could be separated from their referential mimetic function. In visual terms, it now seemed possible to 'read' rather than just 'view' paintings, films, architecture, photography and sculpture. See Martin Jay, "Devolver la mirada. La respuesta americana a la crítica francesa al ocularcentrismo" (Returning the Gaze: the American Response to the French Critique of Ocularcentrism). *Estudios Visuales*, no.1, CENDEAC, Murcia, November 2003, p. 62.

[21] Walter Benjamin, "Pequeña historia de la fotografía*"* (A Short History of Photography)*, Discursos Interrumpidos I. Filosofía del arte y de la historia*, Taurus, Madrid, 1973.

The power of montage as a concept taken beyond the cinema implies a wholly archaeological approach, a 'stratigraphic state' of the image, in which memory and time become critical features, capable of releasing 'value' and 'desire' from the 'time-money' equivalence behind the images.

Value is a quality that amply transcends the question of money and of monetary exchange. It is a variable attribute, a subjective magnitude established in collective operations; it occurs socially and is constantly re-inscribed. Axiological systems must take on meaning in the 'between' of relationships, in the dynamic interior of communities, in their conjunctions and disjunctions, in their desire and 'mutuality'.

Images are more than ever a battleground; bodies in conflict. Not so much because they are merely a reflection of power and the society of spectacle, something we should demonise, but because, in cultural capitalism, they must be accepted as complex objects that shape our existence, our behaviours and views—our biography and our history. We can thus recognise their bio-political potential as elements that forcefully intervene in the set of processes of subjectivation that constitute individualities as well as social collectivities.

How to deploy images then; how to penetrate them and gain access to the flipside. As Didi-Huberman said, looking is long and hard work.[22] Only by re-establishing a critical relationship between the image and its discourses, and between the image and latent axiological systems will we succeed in converting it into a propositional tool.

We will need to unfold their stories if we are to find their sedimentations and constellations; to interpret their symptoms, read their signs and make them ours. The responsibility of rethinking the image according to the concept of a socially transforming and critical use requires us to get right to the bottom; to embrace the other side of all images, touching the opaque shadow—and once there, to perhaps release death's unproductive body from its defective form, mock its inadequacy and free the end from all inhibition. Perhaps this could be our experiment; the secret project of our laboratory.

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[22] Amador Fernández-Savater, Georges Didi-Huberman, [interview]:"Las imágenes son un espacio de lucha"(Images are a battleground), *Fuera de Lugar. Público*, 18 December 2010 [online]. World Wide Web Document, URL:< http://blogs.publico.es/fueradelugar/183/las-imagenes-son-un-espacio-de-lucha> [consulta:26-02-2011].

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