

# Philosophical-Anthropological Meanings of Postmodernism: “Mediatizing” Human

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**Abstract**—The author considers philosophical-anthropological images of a human of late modernism and postmodernism in the context of socio-cultural and technological changes of these periods. The authors analyzes principles of media information influence on a postmodern individual; social, personal and anthropological consequences of said influence are marked. Particular attention is paid to the allocation of the information society features, social media, “second” (A. Giddens) - media – reality, in which a person is included by the information producers and transmitters regardless of his own will and consciousness. The author addresses the issue of obtaining objective knowledge in an endless consistent flow of information. The author analyses Jean Baudrillard’s concept of a simulation of the world, Guy Debord’s Society of the Spectacle, Zygmunt Bauman’s modernism and postmodernism, Roland Barthes’ concept of a mythological media world. The author stresses human rational and identification capabilities, who is found under the constant influence of the media.

**Keywords**—*mass media; postmodernism; late modernism; information society; mass communications; simulation; hyper-reality*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The problems of an individual has always been in the humanities. However, only in some historical periods philosophy pays special attention to anthropological images, meanings and constructs. Jerusalem philosopher Martin Buber noted that some eras allow multiple human theories appear, while sometimes such theories don’t appear at all. What is the reason for that irregularity? The thinker believed, there are certain historical periods of “settlement” and “homelessness”. When the world around seems happy, settled and inviting, profound teachings about human beings may not occur. The eras of “homelessness” and disorder bring about feelings of loneliness, insecurity and personal failure, making thinkers address the problem of an individual. This is when deep and insightful philosophical-anthropological doctrines arise.

Holistic consideration of an individual is only possible in individual's representation in a historical context and in temporal-spatial space, embracing the personal history of

each and every individual. In turn, an individual highlights via his own life the state of society and the conditions of social life. Keeping with the position that the current society is passing the stages of modernism and postmodernism with respective qualitative changes in all the spheres (economic, political, social, cultural), let us note that an individual of modernism is an imminent "product" of his own time with the emerging conceptual justifications and narratives, while a postmodern individual bears his own imprint of the history and radically changed condition of society. The transformation dynamics from modernism to postmodernism is a transition to a society having qualitatively different grounds and characteristics in comparison to the previous ones. Deep and accelerating transformations have affected the very nature of an individual: a postmodern individual differs significantly from the modern version of him.

## II. MODERN AND POSTMODERN INDIVIDUALS

Speaking of a postmodern individual, we keep in mind a personality nurtured by this very period, as it is possible to live under the state of postmodernism representing the modernism or even traditionalism. Further, we are going to discuss the traits of an individual bearing the marks of postmodernism, in particular, the socio-cultural processes and contradictions that actively affect him, even if an individual is not a cause for them and has no chances for their resolutions. Herewith it is important to take into account qualitative, identifying foundations of the individuals' essence. Obviously, the contemporary era considerably changes the status of an individual and his modus operandi, a way of perception as well as philosophical-theoretical forms of reflection on human existence.

It seems to us that the state of postmodern society is best described as “homeless” with a sense of abandonment, and this is exactly what M. Buber wrote about. An individual finds himself "not completely at home" in a rapidly changing world characterized by accelerated flow of social time and breaking down territorial barriers of space and culture. Society's dynamic aspiration to the future, vagueness, "liquidity" (Z. Bauman) of reality, infinite circulation of media flows, and the difficulty of personal identification in

an increasingly complex and diverse world reveal the problem of individual's life orientation choices. That is why postmodernism requires the creation of special anthropological concepts in the new analytical forms, that take into account significant changes that have happened. In this respect, postmodern philosophy, carrying out socio-philosophical analysis of society, offers a new, unique model of the world, justifying the new ways of life. Created anthropological images are quite interesting and associated with the radical transformations that modern society has undergone in recent decades. Let us mark some conceptual philosophical-anthropological postmodern theories.

Postmodernism as a special form of philosophy of the late 20<sup>th</sup> - the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century marks the dispatch from the Enlightenment's period allocation of an individual as a "holistically-centered being, an individual with the unity of mind, consciousness and activity" [1; P. 97]. In the age of modernism, an individual and his uniqueness with the whole range of subjective characteristics was concentrated in the definition of "personality". In the age of postmodernism, subjectivity dissolves in sociality, that, following J. Baudrillard, also dissolves, transforming into other forms, giving birth to something fundamentally different. "An individual is being socially contextualized, a new functional "man-and-his-environment" unity emerges" [2; P. 180].

In comparison to the preceding modernism, individuals of postmodernism are radically different. Moreover, they symbolize the changed phenomena of new social life. According to the postmodern thinkers, a subject is divided into many functions, planes, social and personal roles, likely connected with the division of social life into different spheres (politics, economy, culture) that weaken, dissolve, mutate, and turn into "ephemeral" (J. Baudrillard) media myths. Language narratives (J-F. Lyotard), interpretations and decoded text messages come into play. Infinite information flows possess the human consciousness. Freedom and substance of an individual fade into the background.

Postmodern society becomes discrete, fragmentary, yet unified logic breaks. Human life is thus also fragmented: short life periods surface, presenting the immediacy of the present with short-term personal goals. This immediacy, however, even targeted on the future, may be a subject of change at any time. Such unstable, precarious state of society with radically changed institutional characteristics has led to the fact that the phenomena of social and personality in postmodernism shall be considered from a qualitatively different perspective than in the previous era of late modernism (the late 20<sup>th</sup> century).

### III. SOCIETY OF MODERNISM AND POSTMODERNISM: Z. BAUMAN'S THEORETICAL APPROACH

We find significance in this regard to Z. Bauman's analysis of the society's transformation from the state of modernism or "radical modernism" to the state of postmodernism. In his book "The Individualized Society", the British thinker contrasts the preceding and the current states of society. In his other work "Liquid Modernism",

Bauman uses the categories "heavy modernism" and "easy, liquid modernism" to describe the processes of transformation that societies undergo.

According to Z. Bauman, radical transformation of modernism starts in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and leads to the social order with qualitatively new principles and forms of existence. Comparing the stages of "modernism" and "postmodernism", the philosopher analyzes the aforementioned transformation in terms of social impacts and effects on an individual's cultural identity and adaptation to a dynamically changing environment. This approach seems to us as a kind of methodology that allows to consider the postmodern era as "the individualized society". The interconnection of the changed human nature, feelings, possibilities and underlying social processes are exceptionally important while considering the state of society.

"Individualized" society assumes the rupture of habitual social interactions, set traditions and identities. According to Bauman, individualization as a fundamental characteristic of social existence, has already been introduced at the modernism stage, but it receives more distinct forms at the stage of postmodernism. "Individualization" is described as a continuous "all-consuming" process that frees an individual from the "prescribed, inherited, innate predetermination of social roles" [3; P. 178], that stability and certainty that was true to the people of the preceding early modernism period.

Human activities in the age of modernism was so fixed that, in most cases, people sought not to maintain certainty and stability but to overcome them. Hence, apparently, Bauman's findings on "heavy modernism", determining an individual's life. Status and perspectives of an individual in society of "liquid modernism" (late modernism) transform quickly and cannot serve as a set life goal. Ambiguity, frailty of life goals, the loss of stability – these are the traits of late modernism, presupposing transition to the era of postmodernism.

Despite the fact that in Bauman's works we may find some uncertainty and inconsistency regarding the time and conditions for "heavy modernism" transition to "liquid modernism" (i.e. postmodernism), the essential reasons for these two social realities, however, were clearly and objectively captured by the author. Bauman shows and describes profound changes taking place in the modern world, in particular, in the media sphere, affecting the lives of the people.

We believe that the advent of postmodern is due not only to the individualization of an individual but also to the deepening process of his own identification. The problem of finding one's identity in a current age presents to be acute, changing its appearance and content. The basis for individual's identification is now due to the destruction of the previous forms of social life. The erosion of previously stable social institutions of modernism led to the greater uncertainty in human activities, increased discretion of personal history. Social time in postmodernism is experienced and reflected upon in a new way. The most important characteristic of the state of postmodernism is its

compressed time, reducing the perception to the current moment [cf. 4]. A sense of transience and infinite succession of the life episodes leads to the fact that an individual ceases to feel himself the master and creator of the external conditions of self-existence.

Indeed, in the age of postmodernism the process of individual's loss of control over important social and personal events deepens; awareness of vulnerability, uncertainty increases. Dissonance to the feelings of stability, reliability, inherited from the past period, is getting more obvious. In place of traditionally designated positioning (choice of profession, education, moral and religious self-evaluation, etc.) comes instability, chaotic distribution of social roles, atomization and disintegration of social space. An individual is found in a society where the old relationships and behavioral models are demolished, where the very definition of value is vague due to the infinite scattering. According to the famous remark by J. Baudrillard media, advertising reach in such a society the state of "Xerox" [5].

The subject in the described society is forced to perform many social roles that are more like peculiar "games" with quick and imperceptible changes in their rules and formats. J-F. Lyotard called them "language-games". An individual's stability and success nowadays depend on how quickly he is able to break his own patterns to engage and adapt to new rules without prior notification.

In our view, postmodern society becomes a "risk society" for an individual on all levels, from economic to mental and cultural. The result of the transformations is the ultimate subjective individualization, in which an individual aims in his thoughts at himself only, while other people are seen as a part of the Other, outer (often hostile) world, with which an individual has to find a way to co-exist, not letting it inside and not becoming its immanent part.

#### IV. MEDIATIZATION OF SOCIETY AND HUMAN IN THE POSTMODERN ERA

So what is the most decisive and essential feature, affecting individuals in the postmodern era?

Considering the images of the individuals in the cultures of late modernism and postmodernism, it is necessary to focus on the deepening process of "mediatization" of society. Postmodern individual is seized by the information flows and is included in completely different social and communicative relationships than it was in the previous era. Our fellow individuals are involved in endlessly circulating information flows, for production and transfer of which were created the means that even terminologically describe their purpose: mass media, means of mass communications. In the 1920s-1930s the "early" mass media institutions (newspapers, magazines, movies, radio) were being formed for general, mass consumption [6; P. 155].

Let us note that media, that emerged in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a result of socio-cultural transformations on the international arena and were involved in a public life of the Western states, have radically changed due to the increasing globalization

processes. Instead of the so-called "traditional media", the new media emerged, based on the network information distribution. Largely due to the immediate transmission of the messages, digital media quickly acquired the status of a social institution of a new kind and started to determine the functioning of the individuals and societies.

The postmodern era formed a self-sustaining and self-functioning (autopoietic, in terms of N. Luhmann) system preoccupied with producing and transmitting the information that hasn't existed yet. This kind of information machine is forming the public consciousness, covertly manipulating it at the same time and providing the recipients with information in form of illusive "public opinion", that is often "simulative", "hyperreal" (J. Baudrillard), referring to the "second", artificial, media reality (A. Giddens). Consumption of continuously incoming information virtually eliminates its critical analysis. Thus, the society is being formed around that model of the world which is necessary or beneficial to the owners and producers of the media and media products. Produced and continuously broadcasted worldviews are perceived by the viewers as their own, immanently inherent to the particular individuals, passed through personal experience and, thus, appearing to be true and objective.

Postmodern world, with the primacy of media in it, brings significant changes to the self-identity of an individual, his way of life, perception of the outer world, and the reflective and critical ways of thinking. Under the media influence, society becomes more and more "mediatized" and becomes a subject to pervasive messages, images, symbols, and signs that not only form the background to perceiving social facts but also become a mean of surrounding world cognition. In fact, all knowledge that one acquires about the contemporary world's social, cultural, economic events is received via media. Media "talks" not only about what is happening, but also adds subjective refrain to the content, the latent evaluation of the facts. Thus, "real reality" (A. Giddens) is replaced in human consciousness with illusive, artificially constructed media reality. Therefore, society in a traditionally-modern sense, according to J. Baudrillard, is being gradually replaced by "cyber prosthetics" - virtual reality with dominance of media signs, simulacra, media myths, networking that had replaced real interpersonal communication.

#### V. SIMULATIVE MEDIA REALITY AND "LANGUAGE-GAME" WITH AN INDIVIDUAL

The postmodern individual lives in a largely artificial world of simulations and simulacra. With the spread and improvement of information technology, the deepening of the virtualization of society, the artificial world is becoming more and more natural for the individuals. According to J. Baudrillard, the artificial world is a symbolic reality that has almost lost its connection with the real world. Symbolic reality stands as an independent world, not reflecting the objective social world. Thus, an era of crisis of representation arises.

J. Baudrillard calls the simulative, unauthentic world a "hyper-real" world, stressing its conventionality, complete

## VI. SOCIAL DESIGN AND "THE SOCIETY OF THE SPECTACLE" BY GUY DEBORD

lack of true representation. "Hyper-reality" is the third level of the signs turning into simulacra, when the traces of the objective reality no longer present. Signs now are the likeness of themselves, the only reality. Simulation is a kind of communication when an original is being replaced by its copy with the latter generating a set of services, offers, advertising messages, and so on. "All types and forms of human activities, game, labor are oriented at the production of signs and symbols. The production of signs and not goods and services is now profitable and promising. In other words, goods and services nowadays are tightly enveloped with imaginative... Postmodern simulative hyper-reality is a kind of dispersive varieties. Each simulacrum is fragmentary, partial, self-sustaining and unassigned... there is always a flow of singularities in front of us; de-territorialized clipped culture in which there can be no shared "worldview" [7; P. 148].

Historical social institutions are not destroyed in such a society but are quietly replaced with their likeness. Described by J. Baudrillard, characteristics of the third stage of simulacra production mean the disappearance of the social within the meaning of modernism. This is how the transition from "productivists" capitalism to "cyber neo-capitalism" occurs [5; P. 127, 128], with the total control over society and the manipulation of public relations in the latter one.

Media institution in the postmodern society largely determines and defines the aforementioned model of "hyperrealism". Society is living in a constant never-ending "state of referendum" (J. Baudrillard), that is not aimed at obtaining profound knowledge or analysis of the incoming messages. Any given TV show, numerous political talk-shows, polls, election debates, household advices, and etc. expressed via media – everything is a form of "question/answer" test, invisible to an unsophisticated consumer. As J. Baudrillard puts it: "The whole communication system has passed from a complex syntactic language structure to a binary signal based question/answer system of never-ending test. Meanwhile, it is known that test and referendum are perfect forms of simulation; the answer is suggested, pre-modeled, indicated by the question" [5; P. 134]. Public opinion is being purposefully and consistently formed, depending on the purpose of its creation, applied technology and the degree of media manipulation exercised on society.

Media as the main producer and broadcaster of information, turns out to be the main producer of simulacra. Any problem, conflict, social fact, and accomplished incident becomes a "language-game" of questions/answers, communicative code, or demanding decoding. The task of an individual, included in the flow of diverse codes, is in decoding, interpretation, decision-making and personal choice. Here lies a certain inconsistency: every individual is offering his own version of decoded messages, his vision of a problem. The vision, however, has already been prompted by the broadcaster. An individual is not just decoding messages but is also being simultaneously tested, selected by the means of mass communications.

Social design, as a simulative organization of implausible situations being only seemingly objective – is a peculiar feature of the described "mediatizing" society. Spectacle as the essence of social life was most clearly captured by the French thinker, Guy Debord, in his work: "The Society of the Spectacle". Spectacular technology, a dominating commodity of fetishism, is the theater of social relations when the real world is replaced by the imaginative and contemplative imagery ("ocularcentrism" in terms of G. Debord). Postmodern consumer society that is "accumulating the spectacle", is characterized by scenic, illusory, constructed life. The spectacle is located outside time and space – it is infiltrating everywhere and permeates all social structures. G. Debord writes: "The spectacle presents itself as society as a whole and as instrument for its unification simultaneously" [8; P. 3]. The blurring of lines between self-identity and the world outside, between illusion and reality, is the replacement of objectivity with appearance are the feature of the society of the spectacle. Debord, however, is being quite optimistic, as there is, after all, nothing absolutely negative in the society of the spectacle. The French philosopher sees the way out "in the way of true development, i.e. in the revolutionary critical theory of practice, initiating the same revolutionary actions - the freedom of individual design of the situations, aimed against the contemplative installation, at the denial of the spectacular negation of life" [7; P. 150-151].

The society of the spectacle, being constantly subjected to the vast flows of information, gradually acquires the traits of discontinuity and fragmentation, where the internal logic of social life is disturbed. Human life reflects the life of society – it is also fragmented nowadays with short spans being the basic phenomena, highlighting the immediacy of the present with short-lived personal goals and the ways of implementing them. This momentary present, however, despite some focus on the future, at any time may change, become a thing of the past, and lose social significance. Such rapid turnover of social roles and situations, fragility and instability of personal life goals lead to the dispersal of social institutions, deregulation and disintegration of their structures. This process has been already described by J.-F. Lyotard in the 1970s as "atomization" of the social in the age of "relaxation" [9].

Instability of the individual and social lives in postmodern lead to the fact that an individual in constant search of the new self-identities and images; meanings of life are forced to acquire new identity types to adapt to the ever-changing rules of social life. This happens so fast and often that the very human existence turns into life "at the crossroads", a chain of continuous search and dynamics with multidirectional vectors, illogical rhizome of existence, where linear history no longer plays any role. Instability and uncertainty of the consumer society where media enjoy absolute power while manipulating collective and individual consciousness – that is the essence of the era. Media set the standards of reality and try to accommodate the transmitted images to make them real for the audience. "The desired way

of life is striving to be the life seen on TV... that is the real life that seems to be unreal and it will continue to seem and feel to be unreal until it is turned into images on the TV screens" [10; P. 93]. Of course, individual life, stability of the personal position in the contemporary society, depend largely on the efficiency of changes in the new social systems.

#### VII. PERCEPTION OF INFORMATIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND PROBLEM OF TRUTH ACQUIREMENT. R. BARTHES' MYTHOLOGIES

It is necessary to note one more important problem arising from the influence media having on the consumers of their information.

This is the problem of obtaining objective, true knowledge or the possibility of its "recognition" in an endless stream of media images, messages, meanings, symbols, and simulacra. It makes sense for us to revisit J. Baudrillard's position, who had written a series of remarkable essays on media and their influence on individuals. Trying to deal with the media messages, a subject, in essence, is trying to reflect on only the surface of incoming information. It is nearly impossible to perform an in-depth analysis of the constantly circulating information flows. That is why, in the infinite information field, an individual almost cannot achieve true objectivity no matter how brilliantly analytical he is. An individual has to perceive simulacra, mimicking copies, to replace real social interactions with their virtual analogues or to mistakenly perceive them for the truth, not wholly realizing it. Self-identity starts to dissolve in the stream of symbols and codes presented by media.

Virtual simulation in the postmodern world is a vicious circle of rotating informational products and artifacts, where it's impossible to reach the real object and its real meaning. An individual views reality through the presented copies, constructed images and simulacra, showing positive reaction towards them. (Cf. the Japanese Hatsune Miku, a singer who's not a singer, but a hologram, often perceived as a living thing in concert halls and social life. Young Japanese dance, sing and dress to a program, created by Yamaha company). However, for the sake of objectivity, let us note that a copy isn't necessary worse than the original. Positive perception of symbolically-illusory signs are seen through the active role of image-makers, PR people, show-business producers, advertising creators, software developers.

Very indicative are the ideas of R. Barthes in the aforementioned context. In his "Mythologies", reflecting on catch as an attribute of a modern world, they are largely dominated by theater and theatricality as a principle of modern life. Catch is "a spectacle of excess", but at the same time, it presents "a real human comedy, where every socially specific shade of passion... happily equipped with a highly visible sign, is able to absorb it into itself and to express and communicate it to the last rows of auditorium. It is clear that at that stage it's not important, whether a passion is genuine or not. The audience requires the image of passion and to the passion per se. The problem of truth for the catch is not more

important than for the theater" [11; P. 77]. R. Barthes emphasizes that external symbolic expression, facial expression, features and gestures that artificially represent the expression of real feelings, experiences, pain, justice, defeat, struggle between good and evil, are more important than the real feelings and experiences. Game and symbolic representation of reality, external symbolic expression, and stage illusions appeal to the audience as an "intellectual pleasure". The catch, in that sense, is more apprehensible than the reality. In the myth "The actor in the portraits of Harcourt", Roland Barthes conveys the contradictory nature of life by reasoning the Harcourt camera functions, bursting a person (the actor) out of reality and fixing him "in unearthly beauty" of the scene: "The paradox is that the real fact here is a scene, whereas the city is a myth, a magical dream" [11; P. 87]. The mythological symbols of theater are the images of art largely express in Barthes' presentation the meanings relative to our time; those things that are significantly important, having meaning to people, slip away because of the rapid turnover of events and the liquidity of the modern world.

#### VIII. MEDIA AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES OF THEIR INSTITUTIONALIZATION

Postmodern media have received a special institutional status of "mediacracy" (in terms of R. Debrays [12]), which gives the media structures the possibility to exert a special power over the subject and society. That power cannot be denied; it would also be wrong to underestimate it as its impact is now universal. Media as a new social institution, being exposed to all those postmodern changes that occur in society, complicate its structure. Media not only adapts to the changes, "dissolving" social forms, but also contribute to these processes. Media products are differentiated, seemingly mosaic, and are designed for different categories of population. Eclecticism as a principle of artistic creation of mass culture, affects the content and quality of media agencies, corporations, TV channels and their products. The increasing number of channels doesn't necessary mean the improvement of their quality. However, produced information is so alienated from producing and consuming subjects, that, in the postmodern era, it also acquires the traits of objectivity, self-sufficiency and self-functionality. Information knowledge becomes a commodity to be traded, the main productive force of modern media, alienated, however, from the individuals due to the aforementioned reasons and circumstances.

Let us emphasize once again that communication in the postmodern era is not the usual social interaction of an individual and the other person or community. The nature of new communications is specific and also simulative, as the real interpersonal relationships are being often replaced by the relations of individuals and technology, humans and screens. People gradually get used to this kind of relationship, being brought up by the similarities of social interaction and feeling a deep need for them during their lifetime. Waiting for the on-screen image turns out to be waiting for the mental "images" of bloggers, images of art, public discussions, web forums, and etc.

On-screen interaction, to some extent, restrict individual freedom as any decision associated with the network, information and its visual image. Media communication is partially fragmented. A so-called clipped or mosaic way of thinking emerges. In the 11<sup>th</sup> century, religious thinker Symeon the New Theologian (the creator of the famous concept of personal knowledge of God through the perception of “uncreated” light), reaching particular mystical religious experience of unity with God, asked himself: “Who am I now? Aren’t I God now?” [13]. St. Symeon directed all his thoughts on the inner development of a human seeking God, a supreme being who is cosmic and all-knowing. A postmodern human asks similar questions comparing himself, however, to the technology of the 21<sup>st</sup> century: “Am I a human or a machine?”

Postmodern philosophers called "the end of anthropology" the situation when an individual is found in a state of admiration of communications, existing in form of "homeostasis" of a man and a machine. J. Baudrillard illustrated clearly this point via spectator in front of a TV screen: "The image of a spectator, contemplating a blank TV screen on a day of a strike, will once be considered one of the most stunning anthropological images of the 20<sup>th</sup> century" [14; P. 6].

The philosophical-anthropological questions of our age are being gradually replaced by technology; they are “confiscated” in a sense by computers and other gadgets. However, it is impossible to strive for the technologically simulated reality that is viewed as a supreme value, or denoting it as a role model. N. A. Berdyaev, foreseeing the advent of technological civilization and how it is detrimental for the sacredness of culture, warned: it is impossible for a human to associate with just nature. It is impossible to disclose the depth of the inner world appealing to just nature: “From the lower, the higher could not be born”. A human being is a spiritual, divine creature. Let us add that a human essence can’t also be understood, apprehended, and disclosed by appealing to the machines, and the new technologies represent the replacement of real social interactions with the virtual ones.

## IX. CONCLUSION

The postmodern world, in our opinion, is much more difficult for the human perception than the preceding world of modernism. Society today lives in a symbolic environment, in the world of simulacra, images, illusions, simulations. With the help of information technology, that simulative world turns into the virtual one. Cyberspace virtualization blurs the boundaries between real life and its technical simulation, between objective reality and its illusion. An individual, still, has to keep to himself in a roaring world that is acquiring the characteristics of "almost" real. Reflection can help one return to rationality and allow an individual to become successful and prosperous, towering over machines, gadgets, networks, media flows, information, and programs, i.e. the force that gains more and more power over society and powerfully but invisibly controls it.

A postmodern individual shall flip the already established relationship: not an individual shall qualify for an attribute of time and ruling technologies, but social time and technologies shall change controlled by a human mind.

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