Edited by

Alan Marcus and Dietrich Neumann

Architext

Visualizing the City

Visualizing the City

This book presents a range of interdisciplinary explorations into the urban environment through film, photography, digital imagery, pictorial art and signage. Collating a panorama of urban contexts, *Visualizing the City*'s diverse essays investigate visual representations of urbanism and modernity reflected through the prism of global cultures using a cogent array of methods and texts.

Visualizing the City brings together a compelling trove of visual imagery which represents and engages with twentieth-century architecture, in order to foster new ways of seeing, revealing and revisiting the urban. These essays unpick interwoven city fabrics, whether in Beirut or Paris, Berlin or Rio de Janeiro, London or New York, in an effort to discover how they equate with one another in their intertextual configurations.

This collection is grouped into four clusters that build upon one another, the first providing a foundation for *Reflecting*, exploring visualizations of the urban past. *Remembering and Reinventing* focuses on the way perceptions of cities are affected by the legacy of their past, while *Reframing and Reshaping* considers representations of the contemporary city. The final section, *Revisualizing*, exposes the city remixed, posing questions for a redefinition of the city in the twenty-first century.

Visualizing the City will be of strong interest to scholars and students in the different areas that contribute to the visualization of the urban environment – from architectural and art history to urban studies, film and visual culture.

Alan Marcus is a Reader in Film and Visual Culture and Head of the Film Programme at the University of Aberdeen. He is a cultural historian and filmmaker and as former Director of the Centre for Screen Studies at the University of Manchester he chaired the international conference 'Visualizing the City' in 2005.

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Visualizing the City

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It can be difficult to trace the origins of the gestation of a book, but in this case I have to thank an undergraduate student, whose final year dissertation I supervised on the theme of cinematic representations of the urban. At that time relatively few publications were available in what was clearly an exciting and growing area of scholarship. His questions sparked my interest, and some years later an international conference, 'Visualizing the City', came to fruition in June 2005 at the University of Manchester. The overwhelming interest of the 180 speakers and delegates underscored an interdisciplinary interest in further exploring a field that was now growing in leaps and bounds, as exemplified by the many fine texts on film and the urban which had emerged by then. The University of Manchester was generous in its support, as was the palpable enthusiasm of our participants. It is to them that this book is dedicated.

A number of people have been most helpful in bringing this book to fruition, including Caroline Mallinder and Georgina Johnson at Routledge, and our series editors, Anthony King and Tom Markus, who approached us with the suggestion of writing the book, and provided astute criticism on individual chapters and structure. Alan Marcus would particularly like to thank Penny Woolcock for her support and good humour throughout this project.

Introduction: Visualizing the City

Alan Marcus and Dietrich Neumann

We are all unreliable witnesses, caught forever in space and time, our perceptions prescribed, our flight frozen, wings as set as those of an insect in amber in an Egyptian sarcophagus. *Visualizing the City* navigates a number of historical, theoretical and imaginative encounters with urban space as written about at the beginning of the twenty-first century.[1] The essays in this volume reflect interwoven themes on the city, shared preoccupations about the politics of visual representation – as strong an interest in what is absent from the frame as in what it reveals, in the city as a living text, an imaginative construct, a name which glitters seductively on the departure board of an airport lounge, conjuring up images, desires and experiences, advertising its charms in travel brochures. But the city is also a place where most of us live, with streets we travel through and buildings in which we eat, play, work, rest and reproduce. Is the city a character in our narratives or are we characters in the story of the city?

Beyond a common interest in narrative, an unsettled quality can be detected across these essays. The city is more of a process than a product and a process with multiple identities at that, providing no respite, no fixed place of reference, nervously defending iconic landmarks and familiar skylines to remind us of where we live and who we might be. Walls are built to barricade in the rich and keep out impoverished migrants, but however high and robust the barriers are, they prove porous, permeable; the poor, as well as our anxieties about them, are always with us.

The opening chapter, which establishes an historical underpinning for the study, and the final chapter, which gazes into the near future, cogently frame the book. The middle ten essays are situated in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Despite their diversity, one can discern an undercurrent of fear seeping out from that most bloody time. In the last hundred years, humankind has achieved previously unimagined heights of destruction, with the development of new weapons, both more sophisticated and more barbaric than anything seen before, capable of wiping out vast numbers of people and reducing cities to rubble. Hatred has found new languages with which to speak out and these languages have left

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deep scars on the texture of cities. Across the world there follows a Sisyphian struggle to erase the signs of yesterday's violence – whether it be the legacy of slavery in Rio (Chapter 2, Conde), the death camps of Dachau (Chapter 4, Marcus) or the civil war in Beirut (Chapter 6, Khatib), denial of guilt appears as the one constant in an ongoing project to obliterate uncomfortable memory. In the case of the planes crashing into the Twin Towers (Chapter 5, Neumann) one could argue that the wound is left open to justify other projects. That event offered a spectacle of violence and invited a spectacular response.

While war has accounted for much of the smashing of the old and building of the new, this was also a century with periods of calm and prosperity – at least for those in the developed world – and modernity made firm strides, slums were swept away, tower blocks came and went, replaced by a magpie postmodernist aesthetic which bent back on itself in ever more convoluted and inventive ways. In these essays, we make journeys through the backstreets of specific cities, through time and space, but there are few linear narratives here. The story is slipping out of our control. Few things are as they seem.

For well over a century, cinema has been portraying the city in all shapes and forms, providing us with screen renditions of 'real cities' (shot on location), 'reconstructed cities' (shot in the studio) and now, of course, virtual cities. Undeniably, films have contributed to the image, legibility and branding of our cities. In a world that is increasingly media and screen orientated, it is crucial for architects, designers, planners and policy makers to understand the mechanisms by which one can read and portray a city on screen. These controlled narratives with their three-act structures, primarily male authored and metropolitan, have shaped the way we see ourselves in relation to the spaces we inhabit. Carefully written, directed and edited pieces, intended for a global ticket-buying audience, are now acquiring a somewhat Jurassic quality, as we enter a digital age where almost everyone is a film director and archivist, and we are all actors featured in multiple narratives, watched 24/7 by shopkeepers, security men, police and night watchmen.

As we have become more fearful, public space has come under intense scrutiny. Every journey we take, every move we make, the money we withdraw and how and where we spend it, are watched and recorded in blurred black and white moving images. The resolution can only get better. Private space does not escape this ongoing inspection, as we frantically document our experience of being in the world with digital cameras, taking snapshots, making our own little movies and flying them into cyberspace as attachments, or posting them on web sites for others to see too. It is as if an experience and the representation of it have become almost indistinguishable. These undigested, unedited narratives fuel a queasy sense of ourselves as liminal creatures with no boundaries, while conversely promoting privatized anxieties about increased isolation and personal insignificance in the urban spaces we inhabit. Our well-reported journeys are replete with both meaning and feeling. What we need are translators and interpreters to help us make sense of them.

The 12 essays in this volume are grouped into four clusters that build upon one another, blurring boundaries in the process and revealing many interconnections as they interrogate different means of visualizing the city. The first section provides a foundation for *Reflecting on the City*, as three authors consider visualizations of the urban past (Bruno, Conde and Hake). The second cluster, *Remembering and Reinventing the City* (Marcus, Khatib and Neumann) focuses on the way perceptions of cities are affected by the legacy of their past and the way traumatic events are incorporated into their reinvention. In *Reframing and Reshaping the City*, three essays (Donald, Penz and Tavernor), explore visual representations of the contemporary city, experiencing its own growth-associated conflicts. The final cluster, *Revisualizing the City* (Burnham, Michalski and Stoner), investigates the city remixed, finding its hidden orifices and postmodern interventions, posing questions for a redefinition of the city in the twenty-first century.

REFLECTING ON THE CITY

In the first chapter, Giuliana Bruno addresses the relationship of the moving image to urban mapping, the culture of travel and the mobilization of narrative space in the visual arts. She traverses a varied cinematic landscape, making forays into the fields of architecture, design, cultural geography, cartography and art. Insisting on the inseparability of seeing and travelling in modern culture, her essay offers a panorama of urban visualization, retracing the origin of mobilized space back to early modernity. Bruno reflects on painted landscapes, city views and cartographic representations as important precursors in the genealogy of film. She lingers in the eighteenth century's tactile and mobile modes of representation, claiming them as navigational routes, leading to pre-cinematic, haptic space. In a montage of words and pictures, Bruno offers a cultural journey that turns the *voyeur* into the *voyageur*, emphasizing not only that 'sight' and 'site' but also 'motion' and 'emotion' are irrevocably connected. Transporting us through the landscape of moving images, this outlook on topophilia opens up the world of emotion pictures.

Discussions concerning the homologous relationship between early cinema and urban space are the subject of Maite Conde's essay. It focuses on the ways in which the introduction and development of film in Brazil was part of a project of urban transformation at the start of the twentieth century in the country's then capital, Rio de Janeiro. Implemented by a newly installed Republican regime, the centre of Rio was radically reconstructed. Its colonial Portuguese structures were destroyed and replaced with a modern and universal topography, modelled on Baron Haussmanns Paris. She traces the segregation of contemporary Rio back to this time. Former slaves and impoverished migrants were chased out of the city centre and into the hills – where they still live in the notorious *favelas*, coming down to work as maids, dance in the carnival or to engage in criminality. Employing a range of cultural intertexts from films, music, photographs, newspapers and magazines, Conde explores the complex relationship between the reception and production of early film in Rio and the construction of this new urban topography

and its emergent identities. This chapter suggests that cinema helped to document and chart new and alternative spatial practices in which Brazilian spectators negotiated their own local experiences within the contours of Rio's modern spaces.

Sabine Hake explores the photographic representation of an iconic early twentieth-century building, Berlin's Mossehaus of 1922, and charts its transformation into a symbol of Weimar modernism in architectural publications, photo-books and the illustrated press. The dynamic central section of this hybrid building was designed by Erich Mendelsohn. It gained drama and urgency from the immediate contrast with the existing sandstone façade of 1903. Mendelsohn's repair and addition was both a necessary response to the damage wrought by revolutionary forces in the war's aftermath, and a largely skin deep dressing up of an existing structure. The highly evocative new façade thus served as advertising (for the liberal orientation of the magazine as much as for the power of modern architecture), and its photographic image not only became a trademark for the newspaper's advertising division, but was frequently reproduced. It thematized mediations between the social and the spatial, and the politicized nature of corporate photography. Weimar photography, Hake points out, was deeply implicated in the ideologies of the modern and the urban – in particular when it presented projects associated with *Neues Bauen*. The new architecture was perceived as an expression of modern society, and modern, mass-produced images introduced new definitions of urban culture, alternative notions of social class and a visual vocabulary and perceptual matrix for the New Berlin.

REMEMBERING AND REINVENTING THE CITY

In 1933, 11 years after the opening of the new Mossehaus, the Nazis assumed power in Germany, immediately took control of the news industry and all artistic production, and tightly regulated the publication and distribution of images. The concentration camp in the town of Dachau, outside of Munich, was set up in the same year. In Chapter 4, using an observational film as an integral component of his analysis, Alan Marcus sets out to explore the fraught relationship between the beautiful, old city of Dachau and its infamous concentration camp. Close to a million visitors a year reach the camp by taking a short train ride from Munich and a five-minute bus ride from the station. Most are unaware that they are only a few minutes away from the centre of a well-preserved medieval town with 40,000 inhabitants. After years of studiously seeking to ignore the concentration camp and erase memories of the town's close involvement with its legacy, city fathers have woken up to the commercial appeal of attracting the legions of camp visitors to also visit the town. The city is re-branding itself as 'A Place of Learning and Remembrance', with the camp as just one of the sites worth visiting, along with the local palace, art galleries and museums. Marcus observes that many visitors seem to treat the trip now like any other tourist experience and, in spite of its inherited weight of history, the nature of their interaction with the site is

transforming its meaning. This essay evaluates the visitors' engagement, as they stroll around the grounds, ending up at the former crematoria which ring with the sound of cameras clicking and whirring as visitors pose themselves and their children in front of the ovens. With local traffic thundering past its watchtowers, apartment buildings and a golf course redefining its space, the camp, now awkwardly embedded within the city, presents an icon of contested and reinvented urban space.

At the end of the Nazi dictatorship, German cities lay in ruins. A whole genre of so-called *Trümmerfilme* emerged after 1945 that exploited the devastated cityscape of Berlin as backdrop and metaphor in filmic narratives about the traumatized German psyche. One cannot help but think of such 'rubble films' when reading Lina Khatib's account of the representation of the city of Beirut in post-war Lebanese cinema. Beirut had been celebrated as the romantic, affluent playground of the Middle East in pre-war cinema before it became a byword for chaos and anarchy. The city was at the heart of the conflict in Lebanon, a place Khatib refers to as having 'multiple exclusions' during 20 years of a brutal Civil War that ravaged its historic centre. When the war finally ended, its residents reacted as trauma victims often do, by ignoring the violence and damage of the recent past. The ruins were cleared to make way for new buildings, a project of reconstruction, with few attempts at acknowledging the past by repairing and restoring its former glory. The old souks have become the stuff of myth, things one's grandmother remembers. In a curious reversal, after the conflict ended the reality of war has been denied in the quotidian reality of today's Beirutis, whereas in Lebanese cinema it is as if the war never ended. Memories of repressed pain and violence slip onto the screen in fictional form, the scarred body of the disfigured city symbolizing the inherent contradictions of 'being Lebanese' – a state and a space of both exile and return, marginalization and resistance.

The trauma of the experience of violent destruction in an urban environment and the desire to commemorate the dead are explored by Dietrich Neumann in his essay on the public debate over a light installation consisting of two strong beams. The *Tribute in Light* serves as a memorial to those who died in the attacks on the Twin Towers of New York's World Trade Center in 2001. Although the installation was popular, some onlookers complained about the environmental cost while others found it offensively reminiscent of Albert Speer's *Cathedral of Light*, designed for Nazi Party Rallies. Neumann asks whether it matters on what previous occasions these materials have been used and investigates what these might be. He illuminates the controversy by tracing the history of light memorials commemorating a range of events. He finds a complex tapestry of references, although he notes that they seldom stray too far from militarist connections. Light shows began in the World's Fairs of the late nineteenth century, rejoicing in the new electric power and the dramatic changes it was ushering in. But it soon found employment as searchlight beams in warfare, a use that continues to this day. Triumphalist displays to celebrate victory in battle range from the US navy rout of the Spanish fleet near the Philippines in 1899, to Speer's megalomaniac stagings, and the celebratory blue V above

Buckingham Palace in London 1946. Light mourned those who died after the sinking of the Titanic and now, once a year, stands in for solid chunks of concrete and iron obliterated on a fateful day in 2001.

REFRAMING AND RESHAPING THE CITY

The imagery of the attacks on the World Trade Center reminds us of the widespread destruction of an urban fabric which has been endemic in films such as *The Day after Tomorrow* (2004), *War of the Worlds* (2005) and many others. In Chapter 7, Stephanie Hemelryk Donald re-examines themes of disaster and race neuroses in American popular film. Donald suggests that the central assumption in these movies is that anything that happens in America signifies that it is happening 'everywhere'. The barbarians who used to come over and threaten us from other countries or outer space are now emerging and breaking out ever closer to home, but they are less and less like *us.* Donald critiques the city writer, Mike Davies, taking issue with his relentlessly apocalyptic visions of Los Angeles. She reflects that for him, too, Los Angeles has become a metonym for the entire world, the focus of all that is evil and the site for its biggest disasters. Whereas on the other side of the Pacific, the cinematic imaginaries and architectural trajectories of films set in Sydney and Shanghai, cities that share histories of colonial intervention and hybridity, also explore catastrophes of colonialism and genocide, but 'the streets remain clean and the buildings pretty much intact'.

Violence, race relations and economic inequality in the suburbs of Paris are at the centre of the essay by François Penz. He looks at iconic Parisian films from *A Bout de Souffle* (1960) to *La Haine* (1995) and examines the impact the *reel city* may have on our reframing the *real city*. Godard talked about shooting fiction in a documentary style in order to create a compelling portrait of the city, filming on location and using real people. This approach has become a staple of the French post-war cinematic tradition, even in such highly romanticized fables as *Le Fabuleux Destin d'Amélie Poulain* (2001). Penz notes that with *A Bout de Souffle* and *La Haine*, directors Godard and Kassovitz were interested in the notion of casting *the city as itself*, while also paying overt homage to American cinema. The films are shot in black and white with protagonists who are small-time criminals motivated by greed and boredom, and both have violent denouements. *A Bout de Souffle* takes place in central Paris, jump cutting the famous stroll around familiar landmarks. Although part of *La Haine* is played out there too, the main characters are clearly ill at ease in that section of the city. Feared and suspected by most of those they meet, the rest of the film takes place in their Paris, one unfamiliar to most of us, in the outlying suburban *banlieue*, Chanteloup-des-Vignes. In a reworking of *cinema vérité* methodology, cast and crew lived on the housing project for six weeks and cast all extras locally. Penz recounts that ten years later, when the dystopian vision of *La Haine* was fulfilled in the burning riots of autumn 2005, the director Kassovitz was treated as a spokesperson who might offer explanations for the destruction of the real Paris.

On the other end of the spectrum, the image of the city of London is increasingly composed and crafted by the staff of 'The London Plan', a municipal agency that uses film and multiple photography to control the impact of new buildings for a number of privileged views. Robert Tavernor considers the city's town planning initiatives in order to reveal the reshaped and constructed nature of the London skyline. He explains that planning decisions about the positions, heights and clustering of tall, new buildings are regulated by expert assessments according to their visual impact from fixed viewing positions. Ten principal 'strategic views' were established across London in 1991, intended to safeguard the settings and silhouettes of St Paul's Cathedral and the Palace of Westminster. In 2004, The London Plan refined these in a 'view protection framework'. Whenever a major building is now proposed, its visual impact on the cityscape is assessed through photographs taken from between 20 and 130 different viewing positions. These form the basis for an accurate montaged computer-generated model of the proposed development. Buildings are consequently assessed 'in the round' – as if they were sculptural objects in the urban landscape. London is a city that reflects its history, national identity, language and culture. While it needs to reinvent itself to be livable and progressive, it must also retain visual links with the past that are recognized internationally as being truly 'London'. To paraphrase Lampedusa, London must change in order to stay the same. In order to be packaged and sold, London must bear some resemblance to the city of novels, chocolate boxes and jigsaw puzzles – the London of the tourist imagination.

REVISUALIZING THE CITY

For a city's inhabitants to inhabit an urban space and feel in control of it, unusual measures might prove necessary. As urban environments become denser and their influence on our mental and physical selves grows greater, new relationships are emerging between the individual and the visual environment of the shared spaces and surfaces of the city. Urban dwellers are constantly bombarded by advertising suggesting we consume more, and by governmental hoardings and notices admonishing us to slow down, speed up, turn this way or that and generally stop doing what we want. Small groups of artists have decided that this one-way communication is deeply unsatisfying and have started altering and remixing symbolic signs in potent and innovative ways, inviting others to join in and reclaim their cities. In Chapter 10, Scott Burnham features recent witty street art and urban interventions in London, New York, Stockholm, Chicago and Amsterdam. He provides a multimedia street-level overview of the visual rewriting and remixing that is taking place in urban public spaces, and discusses the influence this has on our relationship with the city. This essay concentrates on skilful projects by erstwhile art school graduates such as Banksy – creative artists who have chosen to use the fabric of the city as their canvas in order to challenge the status quo, while enhancing the environment in inventive and often amusing ways. Corporations are now appropriating these interventions and copying techniques they see

on the street to give their own sales campaigns street-cred. The art market follows suit by putting a high value on the best work, ironically transforming it back into the commodity it set out to reject. Meanwhile, less attractive forms of vandalism, which just as clearly spell out dissatisfaction with the establishment, remain a different kind of visual challenge, one that is far less open to co-option.

There is a hidden, but powerful visual language in the contemporary city, one that operates just beyond the phantasmagoria of consumption. Through photographs we look behind the scenes to focus on the visual signs of mundane infrastructure and workspaces, which also constitute consumer society. By applying a critical aesthetic to technical and administrative markers, such as those framing employee entrances and emergency exits, David Michalski argues in his essay that municipal and corporate networks have constructed a public visual language that is effectively used to distinguish between different social spaces. He examines how this aesthetic system informs the performance of work and leisure, private and public life, ideas about safety and authority, and current conceptions of geography. Michalski reveals how this visual language is crucial to the propagation of the consumer spectacle which obscures it, and why the spaces where this system is deployed most robustly often become heightened contested sites. Standardized signs work globally in shopping malls as transformative mechanisms for changing identities, shifting individuals from consumers to employees and back again. Exit beacons glow ubiquitously, signalling to all of us a constant state of emergency at a time of heightened fear of terrorism – transforming shopping itself into a 'dangerous and even heroic activity'.

'Fantasy is a place where it rains', observed Italo Calvino. In the final chapter, Jill Stoner presents some of her own architectural fantasies conceived over the past dozen years in a revisualization of the city. These imagine both additions and subtractions to the urban landscape that bear little resemblance to almost all of what now passes for both architecture and urban design. She proposes to deconstruct buildings with the force of nature and makes an odyssey upstream against the currents of technology, progress, capitalism, professionalism, and most aggressively new urbanism. Stoner takes us on an abbreviated tour of Detroit, Houston and São Paulo, glancing at J. G. Ballard and Ray Bradbury, Diana O'Hehir and Wendell Berry along the way. She imagines their urbanism compromised and enriched by birds, farms, wilderness and wetlands. We learn that the recovery of the peregrine falcon from the brink of extinction depended upon us seeing the city not as a metaphorical 'urban jungle', but as a literal landscape of height, distance, airspace and foothold. We stand on the twentieth floor of San Francisco and imagine this entire layer of the city returned to natural forces, swept by wind, colonized by alpine plants, traversed by birds, penetrated by torrential rains, and even visited, though respectfully, by humans.

In *Visualizing the City*, the urban is visited, revisited, projected and reprojected for our inspection and introspection. Collectively, these essays unpick inter-woven city fabrics, whether in Rio or Paris, Berlin or Beirut, London or New York, in an effort to discover how they equate with one another in their intertextual

rearrangements. From celebrated citadel to the destruction of iconic monuments, the promise of urban power, coupled with efforts to fill the void – be it ground zero with twin beams marking the spot where 2,800 people lost their lives, or the vacuous space of KZ Dachau, where over 30,000 people were systematically destroyed, the city's constructs and visual representations remind us of our mortality. As these essays explore, urban life pursues a looped struggle for sustainability and advancement, charting the exit of its inhabitants and the entrance of new structures with which to punctuate the skyline and our need and fascination for the built environment.

Alan Marcus
Dietrich Neumann
Aberdeen and Providence, 2007

NOTE

1 The impetus for this book grew out of discussions following the 'Visualizing the City' conference held at the University of Manchester in June 2005.

Part I

Reflecting on the City

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Chapter 1: Haptic Space

Film and the Geography of Modernity

Giuliana Bruno

As an art of viewing the city, film was born out of the geography of modernity and its visual culture. The invention of cinema is set at a transformative moment in the cultural panorama of modern life. A new spatiovisuality was being produced as film emerged. The city was the center of this transformation. Alongside the urban aesthetics of panorama paintings and dioramas, architectural venues such as arcades, department stores, the pavilions of exhibition halls, glass houses and winter gardens, along with the railway, incarnated the new geography of modernity.[1] These were all sites of transit. Mobility – a form of cinematics – was the essence of these new architectures. By changing the relation between spatial perception and motion, the new architectures of transit and travel culture prepared the ground for the invention of the moving image, the very epitome of modernity.

Film emerged out of a visual field in transition. It implanted in a shifting terrain marked by changes in the history of art, visual representation and the design of the city. In charting the movement of this visual geography, in this essay, we will look at the encounter between film and the architecture of modernity focusing on the agency of haptic motion in the making of modern space. As the notion of the haptic will play a feature role in this cultural panorama, let us first consider its genealogy.

HAPTIC SPACE

Haptic refers to the sense of touch. As Greek etymology tells us, *haptic* means 'able to come into contact with'. As a function of the skin, then, the haptic – the sense of touch – constitutes the reciprocal con*tact* between the environment and us. It is by way of touch that we apprehend space, turning contact into communicative interface. As a sensory interaction, the haptic is also related to kinesthesis, or the ability of our bodies to sense their own movement in space. In this sense, then, I take the haptic to be the main agent in the mobilization of space – both geographic and architectural – and, by extension, in the articulation of the spatial arts themselves, which include motion pictures.

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