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Hegemony and the Paradox of Public and Private

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1. In general, public and private have been understood, in an essentialist manner, as being two separate areas of modern society. There is some superficial evidence for this. First of all, there is the separation of household and workplace, which Max Weber saw as one of the central characteristics of the occidental process of rationalization. As a result of such a separation, men become the heads of the families, governing them, providing for them and representing them within societal life. Women, on the other hand, assume responsibility, under the direction of their husbands, for household tasks - that is, for household management, child rearing, supervision of the household personnel and representative functions. In short, she must be frugal, orderly and industrious, while at the same time being sensitive, affectionate, tasteful and cultured, for the household can also be a place of public debate and aesthetic discussion. Male and female citizens meet here and make their positions clear on fashion, education and upbringing, customs, taste, morals, whatever they see as necessary for the maintenance of the life-style appropriate for their class. They observe one another's private transgressions and catastrophes, and

sanction these whenever they are seen to be a danger to the status quo.

A second reason for conceiving public and private as two separate areas of modern society is the separation of economy from politics. Here, the private includes both the household and the place of business. The enterprise, the factory and the office are all under the control of the owner of capital. Although these are in fact public spaces where individuals participate in social life and communicate with one another, where they are integrated into a social division of labor and enter into a global form of socialization, where they find social recognition for their skills and abilities, and where they earn their living, none of this counts as public. Only politics and the state are seen as a public arena.

This public arena is where property-owning citizens meet. They exchange views in cafés and inns, and prove their ability to reason in publicly conducted talk. In discussions of newspaper articles they judge literature, the policies of the government and the laws that apply to them, and with this critical discussion they assert their right to influence all of these. Public discussions and media are the location of democracy in the pre-democratic phase of bourgeois domination; these claim to embody the democratic sovereignty of the people vis-à-vis the state. For in the media citizens exchange views concerning their economic and political interests, while at the same time raising objections and making suggestions concerning policies. It was journalists, in fact, who, so long as there were no political parties, no parliament in continuous session and no career politicians, practiced politics as a independent sphere of action over the long term, and who therefore acted as a check on government administration.

Thus, the household and the family are distinct from an area of private economic interests, the latter being constituted by the bourgeoisie and workers within a framework of global societal relationships. The family is also distinct, however, from the public arena, the arena of politics and government and collectively binding decision-making, where *citoyens* can and must assert their influence through rational argument. Under closer examination, then, private and public divide into four areas: familial household; business; public opinion organized by political parties and the culture industry; and, finally, government administration and policy.

The household, compared to the three others, is the least public area; and yet it is still not private for it is also subject to the logic of the other areas. This is true above all in light of the interest on the part of the business, public opinion and government spheres in the generative, socializing and habitual reproduction of the middle-class itself. The male head of household saw the family as a means of bequeathing his property. Women were to be kept under control so as to insure that all children were really those of the family head. It was important to raise the heir in a manner that enabled him to face the hardness of his future life of work - running a business, managing subordinates and directing wife and children. In this regard, women were not trusted as agents of a proper rearing. As a result children were subject to compulsory schooling, with sons being sent to boarding schools to be socialized from an early age on into the rigors of male networking and the collective customs their class. The state monitored demographic developments, as well as the spread of diseases and cases of death; it sanctioned a normative mode of life; and it placed physical and mental deviations under surveillance and marked them for exclusion. The public developed an interest in the medical purity and health of blood or genetic

material; in the fertility and birthing capability of women and of the fertility of the spouse; and in familial health practices, which could lead not only to a destruction of the family but to a burden for the community. The culture industry developed models of heterosexual intimacy, from the first flirt to child rearing, that were spread around the world. These models created not only a world of images but also a collective cultural practice, consisting of such various elements as cosmetics, clothing, magazines, beauty contests, diets, patterns of communication and sexual practices. Relationships as couples and families are, in their most intimate practices, not private but publicly controlled, monitored and regulated institutions.

2. One result of the first paragraph is that there is no fixed meaning, no stable realm of public sphere. The public sphere is only by definition of some powerful actors public, whereas the private and the public are always crossing each other. 'Private' and 'public' are, as sociological terms, too imprecise to characterize definable spheres. For this reason I suggest to view them as a symbolic *dispositif*, as a symbolic device, a symbolic ordering, that organizes a specific representation of societal space. They were developed by the bourgeoisie as one form of its hegemony. The bourgeoisie, from its very beginning, has known how to move in a virtuoso manner within this symbolic space and, at the same time, how to exclude other social actors.

The public arena designates the place where factual information, a well-founded point of view and a reasonable judgement take form out of opinion, gossip and rumors. The public arena, as organized by the press, represents a powerful grip on societal communication, which, if not kept under control, could leave the circle of the

household economy, spread uncontrollably in leaps and bounds, and in a diffuse manner, lead to social unrest. With a public arena one can characterize something as a circumscribable expression of opinion, have an overview of its manner of spreading and localize its origins. The principle of attribution and authorship arises, with which one can commodify a piece of information and give it a value.

The public arena, then, is not, from the outside and after the fact, subordinated to the power of capital; rather it is, already in terms of its very principle, a mode of valorizing and controlling societal communication. On the basis of this subordination, the allegedly most public thing of all, the forming of opinions within the public arena, becomes private property, and, as such, steers the articulation of interests. Attribution and authorship make public debate and even lawsuits possible. One can deny a news report, but not a rumor. News reports provide behavioral security, permitting one to form expectations and make calculations of utility. Such news reports - maintained in stabile form, and validated and authorized - are extremely important for long-term economic and political action in an economy based on anonymous and blind markets. They produce clarity and intelligibility for economic actors concerning which expectations are rational and which actions prudent.

As far as political domination is concerned, where knowledge can be monopolized, news reports and information create a considerable source of power; for those who are dominated can never know exactly what others are doing, which modes of collective behavior are developing and succeeding, and with which political reactions and decision they will have to contend. On the basis of this relationship of political domination as domination through knowledge, there results a specific model of a bourgeois

critique of domination. According to this model, the democratic character of a state is measured in terms of whether, and to what extent, it monopolizes knowledge for the sake of the use of power. The power of the state consists, on this model, in a knowledge advantage over its subjects, whether this advantage is created by surveillance, by police or intelligence agencies, or by information policies that misinform citizens and through this misinformation give them false expectations about the future. Representative democracy, on the contrary, is a political coordination mechanism that makes state action dependent on the forming of opinions in a public arena.

If the public arena is defined by features such as newsworthiness, attributability, authorship, procedural correctness and orientation towards the state, then the forms of discussion found within the household and among women must count as useless chatter, as dangerous gossip and rumor, which should be given no weight. But this talk is ,nonetheless, like the talk of taxi drivers, still a source of information for the forming of opinion and the making of decisions within the public arena because it is suspected that opinions are being expressed here that, although uncivilized and irrational, point to, just for that reason, deeply set modes of behavior. It is the vernacular, the popular opinion, which is allowed expression and which is then heard, in carnival, in cabaret and in jokes, for a limited time and in a socially diffuse, conventionalized manner. Sociology is now attempting, using elaborate qualitative procedures, to get a hold on these forms of everyday social communication in terms of a so-called second public arena. Often this is tied to the assumption that there are, in this second public arena, dangerous, authoritarian raw opinions that, if only they were brought into the public arena proper and confronted with the

forceless force of the better argument, would then, necessarily, be rationalized.

3. If one looks closely at the logic of this symbolic order then one sees that it is arranged asymmetrically. The public arena counts in several ways as better than the private. At the public pole one finds such ideas as freedom, democracy, rationality and universality, discussion, social interaction, decision, will and authority. These properties are reserved for those who enter this part of symbolic space, namely, men. These properties, on the contrary, are not applicable to that marked as private. Here one finds an exercise of power that the state and administration utilizes only for private and particular interests, and, therefore, which is viewed as liberty-constraining and undemocratic. This type of private exercise of power is found, for example, in the corporatist reaching of compromises between large associations, such as trade unions and employee associations, or within the family and among women. The path of emancipation is laid down, and is alleged to run along the symbolic axis from private to public.

It is in this form that the emancipation of women has also been accepted over the past years. Women enter the labor market; they pursue their interests in the public arena; and they act politically. At the same time, they make an issue out of the narrow limits of familial privacy, and make clear that the symbolic space of the private is itself politically created. It was removed from the public arena by men for the sake of their own particular interests, the same men who reserved the public arena and the state for themselves as a privileged place and who allotted women and children to the family as the private sphere. The family was a space of retreat and security for men, to which they could return when

exhausted, or needed moral and loving support; and to which they devoted themselves when they had time left over after their daily business, after public discussions in taverns, and after politics or voluntary civic service.

There are three empirical points that speak against the idea that emancipation ran historically along an axis in which the private becomes increasingly transformed into the public. First, the welfare state has over the past decades drawn considerably on women's work; and there are in fact many women employed in the public sector. The state and the public arena have been, therefore, to an important degree shaped by women.

Second, neoliberalism has succeeded in initiating a reversed movement from public to privatization. This process of privatization is conceived as a de-bureaucratization and an increase in the initiative, freedom, responsibility and participation of citizens. This changes the concept of the private, for now public goods such as public transportation, communication systems, education and social security are produced privately and as a means of the accumulation of capital. While it was one of the central goals of the left and the women’s movement to transform the private life of the family and the arcane practices of the state, by increasingly expanding public space, extensively and intensively, today we see a counterreaction which aims at limiting the realm of the state. This also narrows the range of topics which may be discussed in the public arena. This, however, is evaluated as highly desirable.

Third, there is the empirically observable need on the part of both women and men for privacy. They feel overtaxed by career demands; they lack free time and recreation; and they feel under tremendous pressure to conform in their public expression and

behavior, and in their work life. They demand, as a right, that the state and public not intervene in all private decisions.

4. More important than these empirical objections, it seems to me, is a systematic problem that is related to the concept of a public arena. Let us imagine that all private forms of life have been made completely public by a process of emancipatory catalysis. In this case, the public arena would exercise continuous surveillance and control over every form of individual expression; for all interest, needs and thoughts would have an immediate public meaning. The public arena would be total, indeed, totalitarian. The public arena would then be completely transparent to itself, and the institutional substitute for, in the language of the philosophy of consciousness, the identity of subject and object. This model is realized in the television program, *Big Brother*, currently being broadcast in several European countries. In this program the private life of a group of people, who voluntarily live together for several months, is broadcast on television. For the purposes of the show, everything that the occupants do is recorded non-stop on camera. Privacy does not exist.

Two things are happening now, restricting the public sphere from its inner dynamics. First, the total surveillance of the private turns into an enormous banalization of what is observed. The private is now completely public, and becomes an uninteresting stream of everyday events without news value. But since it takes place within the public arena the participants become, as a consequence, public persons and stars of a new kind within a culture industry that, since it can think of nothing else, markets everyday life. A kind of information over-kill arises.

Moreover, as a second consequence, the public arena is acknowledged, even more than earlier, to be a sphere with a low attention span. The public arena is, as a result, itself split up into several segments that are hierarchically related to one another, with each characterized by different forms of knowledge management. It is no longer a matter of public communication, in which citizens participate with arguments and counter-arguments. It becomes decisive to have the opportunity and the capability to protect oneself from information, to choose selectively and, in each case, to decide what counts as publicly relevant. This practice of selection - the possibility of refusing public communication - becomes the basis for new forms of private power.

A similar phenomenon can be observed in the Internet. The Internet is overwhelmed with real-time information, and news reports are not checked by editors. As a result, one hears the complaint that every kind of rumor can be propagated unfiltered, leading to irritations in the stock market and in politics. As a reaction to this return of the rumor not only have no-access zones been set up in the form of communication collectives, but corporations are attempting to systematically establish new property rules as well that will assure the authorship and attributability of communication, and in this way preserve their value. To counter communication that is too open and uncontrollable, high speed networks are being set up with limited access,
both technically and socially; and these are expensive to use.

5. I want to pursue the paradox that is linked to the goal of emancipation through entry into the public arena a bit further. Public discussion is supposed to help rationally coordinate

particular interests. This is only necessary so long as there are non-rational interests and attitudes. If the life-world becomes so rationalized that everyone acts only in public and in a universalistic way with a view toward the General Other, then there would no longer be any privacy; no more particular interests would arise that would need to be discussed publicly. In this way, the public arena is undermining its own foundation. The public arena is dependent on its opposite, the private sphere and its particularity. Those who view the public arena as connected with a claim to emancipation - in Germany, above all Jürgen Habermas - see this. Since they conceive emancipation only along the symbolic axis public-private, they necessarily limit the concept of emancipation, and defend the life-world's private, irrational and particularistic practices. The private sphere should not be completely dispersed; there must continue to be particularistic, private interests, so that there continues to be 'material' there that can be publicly rationalized. »The political public arena can, of course, only perform its function of dealing with general societal problems to the extent that it is itself formed out of the communicative contexts of those affected,« that is, those who are suffering from the external costs and internal disturbances of the economic and state-political system. »For the public arena derives its impulse from the private processing of complexes of societal problems that have resonance for individual biographies.« (Habermas 1992: 441f)

The public arena, then, becomes, as a consequence of the manner in which public is conceived, so circumscribed that, in the end, it is only a regulative idea, a virtualization and a norm that is not permitted to achieve real success in the real world. In the end, not everything may, in fact, be included in the public arena; there remains only the possibility of such inclusion.

This dialectic within the concept of the public arena, I wish to argue, thus creates, out of itself, here, the private and, there, the public. Habermas introduced the public arena as a post-metaphysical concept; yet one can see in the example of this concept the fact that, and also how, modern bourgeois society is not able to overcome metaphysics. For if metaphysics is, following Derrida, characterized by presence, the present and transparency, then the all-encompassing public arena would be pure presence and transparency. But that is exactly what the public arena cannot be without dispersing itself. For that reason, it is understood as a postponement, a process in which every contributed opinion can be criticized and replaced by other expressions of opinion. The public arena can never come to rest in itself; instead, it must always postpone itself, continually differentiate itself from itself by means of conflicts of opinion. For this it needs the private sphere, and develops itself only through the many private expressions of opinion.

The public arena must limit itself, despite its drive towards comprehensive generality, and forego encompassing all areas of society. It must let the state, as well as the economy - the public and the private - operate independently: ">From this it follows for democratic movements that arise from civil society that they must renounce the goal of a self-organized society, a goal which was the basis for, among others, the Marxist idea of social revolution. Civil society can only directly transform itself and indirectly have an effect on the self-transformation of the constitutionally organized political system. »But it does not take the place of a meta-subject drawn from the philosophy of history that is supposed to bring society in its entirety under its control, and, at the same time, legitimately act for it.« (Habermas 1992: 450) In order to prevent itself from being transformed into the identity of metaphysics, the

public arena requires the state and the economy, under which individuals suffer so much, so that these individuals have something public to discuss.

6. The kind of public arena suggested by Habermas is supposed to be understood as counter to metaphysics. Thinking about the matter this way, it sounds critical and emancipatory. But if one considers the actual logic on which the argument is based one sees that the *différance* developed in, and through, the public arena is based on an enormous complex of power, one which develops internally, that is, within the public arena itself. I would like to introduce two arguments to support this claim.

1) The claim that an inclusion takes place by means of the public arena and public debate applies to the public arena and its mechanism themselves. It can be seen empirically that there is no unified and comprehensive public arena; rather there is a multiplicity of public arenas. But this contradicts the claim itself, for in this way the principle of the public arena is destroyed. It is certainly an interesting question as to when a societal communicative relationship counts as public; but, putting that issue aside, one can ascertain the existence of limited public arenas that may be characterized by particular localities; styles of argument; the arguments themselves; topics; forms of appearance; and modes of action - for example, protest in the form of a strike by male and female workers; a demonstration in front of the parliament; an article in a neighborhood newspaper; a sub-cultural discussion round; a discussion in parliament; or a national television show on the construction of nuclear power plants. However, what concerns me is something else; namely, the assumption that, as a result of the inner logic of the public arena,

these limited public arenas become more and more intertwined with one another, since arguments generalize themselves, become linked to arguments in the other limited public arenas and, in this way, make these other arguments (more) public. One could characterize the assumption in this way: It would be a self-contradiction if the public arena, which, by means of publicly offered arguments, raises a claim of universality, were itself to remain a mere particularity. At the end of every public discussion, accordingly, a coherent public arena must be in place.

This conclusion, however, cannot be empirically supported, as can be seen from a analysis I carried out of the reporting and commentary practices of 10 national daily and weekly newspapers over a period of approximately nine years, which I would like to look at briefly. The question was: how the German public arena reacted to social protest movements against nuclear power plants, airport extensions and arms buildups - whether it viewed the protestors as citizens belonging to a democratic populace, engaging in public discussion; considered their practice of civil disobedience as legitimate public expression of opinion; and recognized their concerns as public issues. If one looks at how the actors, that is, citizen action groups and social movements, evaluated their factual arguments and demands, as well as their democratic mode of expressing themselves, then it becomes clear that the German public arena split into two large blocks. On the one side, there was the bloc of newspapers supporting inclusion who were open to arguments and participation. During the whole time of the greatest social protest movements they allowed the actors to speak for themselves and discussed the arguments seriously and objectively. On the other side, there was the bloc of media supporting exclusion. It was characteristic of this group of national newspapers that they pleaded, with increasingly vehement public arguments,

for exclusion during the course of growing protests, and, in particular, in reaction to the peace movement's opposition to NATO's arms build-up; in fact, they did not want to recognize a part of the public arena as public at all.

Thus, one can derive from the concept of the public arena no guarantee of inclusion. Again and again an interest must establish itself publicly in order to be recognized within the public arena. And it is precisely the post-metaphysical logic of *différance* that demands from all interests that they establish themselves publicly over and over again through the struggle of opinions, because within the public arena there are always counter-opinions. The public arena is agonistic. A power relation and antagonistic relation, however, develop within this dynamic: for, again and again, women must struggle in pursuit of their interests and for their demand for a place within the public arena; again and again, individuals must argue against racism; again and again, wage earners must fight for their wages, for acceptable work hours and for their rights. But now this counts for all interests; and it is characteristic of bourgeois society as a whole that it is a social relation that continually transforms itself through criticism, competition and conflict. In this process of self-transformation, however, some complexes of interests count as worthy of preservation and renewal, and others do not. Above all, however, some social groups are better able to live with this continual transformation than others, because this is a form of life from which they profit.

2) *Différance* is a process that develops in time, through a text, along a trace or a chain of signifiers or statements. Acts of communication follow one upon the other and must be recognizable to one another as such. If they all take place at once, or if they are dispersed, without connection, then no one can any

longer listen to another. The public arena demands an order that organizes communication, procedures that determine when and where what will be spoken; who will speak and who will listen; what weight a speaker's word will have on the basis of his or her institutional speaking position; in what order speech acts will take place; and, finally, into what kind of actions words should issue. Thus, the public arena is a space that is institutionally structured in various ways.

There are particular people who exercise the privilege of speaking within the public arena, who claim for themselves the collectively available time and space for this, and who, at the same time, make this unavailable for others. These latter must listen; they are the audience.

The role of the speaker is institutionalized in public space; it belongs to intellectuals. And for intellectuals, as for politicians, there is the problem of representation. They speak for others, for the general public. If they speak publicly once or twice successfully, then a certain reputation or charisma attaches to their words - they speak for the general public and the attention of the public arena is guaranteed them. There is a general presumption and expectation that intellectuals, anointed by the location of their talk and by the procedure which led them to this location, will continue to speak for the general public.

Intellectuals, for their part, expect these expectations, and claim that they fulfill them through there expressions of opinion. If they are successful in this, however, this can never be conclusively proven. For the role of the audience is, in general, as Habermas explains, simply reduced to a yes or no response; the audience's communication is thus restricted to the minimum. If the communication fails, and many individuals in the audience do not

feel represented, it is, in the same way, not correctable; for speakers do not have to acknowledge this, since they will always find someone who agrees with them and who shares their interpretation of the situation.

Finally, public speakers may assert many things. All the others are merely individuals and private persons; public speakers, however, appear publicly and move within the medium of the general. Often, individual private persons do not even know that it is their interests that are being discussed; and, by the time they can defend themselves with public arguments and demands for revision, it is already too late, and others have taken their advantage from the situation. The public arena rests on an informal mode of representation which always enables the formation of power and deprives the great majority of people of their ability to make decisions. For, the majority of people simply do not have the *savoir-faire* to perceive the function of representative, public intellectuals, journalists and politicians.

8. The power already implied in the public arena as a space of public discussion is further increased by the fact that the public arena is also generally understood to be an area which includes politics and government action. Political action takes place under severe time limits. This creates its own constraints. One can see this, for example, in the development of Habermas' theory. Habermas began with the idea that the public arena was a space of communication free from domination, where citizens could reason together about decisions without the constraint of needing to act immediately, and, after considering all arguments, reach a decision. However, too many things needed to be communicated simultaneously. So, procedures were introduced limiting the range

of communication: socially; with respect to content; and temporally -everyone may not talk endlessly about everything. Communication must be eased of it burden to the extent that it is only the possibility of discussing everything that is permitted.

However, much that is decisive is simply counted as background until further notice. Since communication would be too complex otherwise, modern society has differentiated out a sphere of political-administrative action, in order to relieve communication from decision-making. This sphere, where citizens come-to-know-themselves in a democratic manner, is harnessed exactly between the life-world of private-familiar interests, on the one side, and the state-administrative side, on the other. Pubic discussion is such that it limits itself to only influencing the legislative process, which, in turn, programs government action. One can formulate this also in a restrictive way: only acts of communication contributed publicly, and directed towards the official political processes of a modern, representatively organized society, can be understood as public. Everything else falls back into the private sphere. Thus, in the end, the state, by means of a recursive loop, indirectly defines what is to count as public discussion.

The state, however, defines public communication in a further sense. For the state is the sphere of political decision. Not everything that is decided is the result of previous communication. It is much more the case that politics must react to new challenges: the development of oil prices, an environmental catastrophe, currency speculation or decisions made by international committees. In all of these cases parliament is called upon to agree to decisions made by the government. The public arena can then criticize political action after the fact. But this has no consequences. The state has won time and created facts. The possibility, bound up with the concept of the public arena -

namely, to make virtually everything the object of public discussion - once again suffers irreparably from an unavoidable non-simultaneity: public discussion always comes too late.

9. The claim made here is that the symbolic axis, public-private, should be understood as a form of bourgeois hegemony. That which is to count as public and private is defined by the state. In this way, a symbolic space is created that organizes societal action, forcing it to achieve a certain degree of mobility and dynamic, but also involving this movement and dynamic in contradictions and paradoxes. The public arena derives, out of itself, a necessary need for privacy and for the state; and in this way a need for the opposite of what it claims to be. It is these paradoxes that have confronted the left and the women's movement, as well as all others who have, over decades, demanded that the private sphere be transformed into the public arena. Private and public have no stabile meaning, and demand, as a result, an enormous mobility.

My claim is that public and private , in a manner similar to left and right, or government and opposition, are symbolic divisions of, and limits to, social practices, which take place in a space that I would like to characterize, following Gramsci (and despite any misunderstanding this might produce), as "civil society." This is a wide ranging area that counts as private - as, to be sure, newspapers and television are private property - which Gramsci, nonetheless, viewed as an extension of the state because it is the state which determines what is private and what is public. While the state in the narrower sense consists of the means of violence, government and administration, civil society is an area in which comprehensive social parties form, generalizing their interests through political coalitions and seeking to push their particular world-view onto

others. It is here, in daily conflicts, that the power relations are created which provide actors with the kind of knowledge that leads them to believe that they should allow themselves to be steered and government by a state.

Civil society is, in this way, the foundation of the state to the extent that, here, daily practices and attitudes are produced that lend continuity to a state's government and its application of force. It is an area that represents a complexly organized power relation among social classes and genders, and which encompasses a great deal: magazines, journals and newspapers; street names; libraries and publishing houses; armed groups and private security services; political circles and galleries; education circles and academies; counseling centers and therapy institutions; advertising and movie theaters; discotheques and fitness studios; consumer groups and non-governmental organizations; sub-cultures and clubs. In all of these areas individuals and social groups each struggle over collective habitual modes of living and the nature of routine, a struggle that rests on a silent consensus among people within everyday life, a consensus which is the fundamental condition for the maintenance of domination.

The concept of a "public arena" is a too inexact sociologically to be of use in analyzing this complex. It can, however, function as a schema with which to model power constellations. The axis private-public shows that the basis for consensus within the political state shifts, and that habitual modes of collective action change. Looked at in this way, it can be important in politics to struggle for the recognition of a social relation as public, but then it is a question of a *means* toward emancipation, and not the end itself. These means can themselves become counterproductive, because they come to initiate a new wave of, either, increasing power for the state or privatization.

Literature:

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