

Chapter 7

The Inhuman and the Automaton

Exploitation and the Exploited in the Era of Late Capitalism

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1. THE DYAD: TECHNOLOGY, THE ANIMAL AND THE INHUMAN

The radicalized dyad of technology and the organic, which I will term the “human-in-human,” resorting to the terminology of non-standard philosophy (Laruelle), homologous to and drawing on the idea of the cyborg (Haraway), cannot be reduced to a meaning or truth. François Laruelle’s human-in-human is neither physical nor transcendental (or linguistic) but rather a radical hybrid of the two. In other words, the human-in-human that is a cyborg escapes philosophy or the reduction to a “truth of the real” as a real that pretends to be more real (perfect) than the real itself. By virtue of its determination-in-the-last-instance as a “radical dyad,” that is, a dyad constituted by unilateral elements that do not establish a unity in the sense of dialectical reconciliation, sublation, or any other form of unification of the two constituents. The human-in-human is nonhuman or “inhuman” (Haraway), monstrous along with the animal, the machine and the darkness of the out-there insofar as it remains a radical hybridity or one that is philosophically unmediated. The real precedes signification and occupies the position of mere materiality (either physicality or machinic materiality) unilaterally situated vis-à-vis a signifying agency. This dual unilaterality is placed within a dyadic structure.

The human radical constructedness grounded in—although not reducible to—the binary of technology and the organic (or “nature”) does not make it more rational, more “intelligent,” and less physical, less animal. Quite to the contrary, the kernel of hybridity does not contain a purely technological or rational purpose—it is as unruly, as meaningless, as “merely material” as the animal. The kernel of hybridity is the “lived” or the experienced without a subject, that is, the experiential or the presubjective “taking place.” The

hybrid is, therefore, an instance of the real that precedes language or the transcendental. It is inhuman or, put in Laruellian terms, nonhuman.

The first movement toward transforming it into a meaning, elevating it into a form which plays a role in an organized universe (= philosophy), is a movement toward humanization aligned with the Enlightenment project. The latter represents a metaphysical project consisting in a secularized version of the theological-philosophical idea of humanism and the role of nature (and reason) in it. In other words, the non-philosophical approach to the idea of humanity and the role of technology in its constitution, regardless of whether conceptualized in terms of the classical humanist tradition or in the posthumanist one, is the necessary condition for transcending the anthropocentric naturalization of technology. Non-philosophy identifies the inhuman or the nonhuman real as the identity in the last instance of being human or of participating in the “species being” (Marx) of humanity. One of its first names is human-in-human, a non-philosophical designation which refers to humanity without humanism whose agency can also be called nonhuman (analogous to Haraway’s inhuman).

Humanity is a theologico-philosophical creation, and it is always naturalized. Thanks to philosophy and theology, nature is always humanized. As long as the technological component of the radical dyad called the cyborg can be humanized or transformed into pure transcendence constituting the only accessible reality (= pure rationality), it is neither monstrous nor inhuman. It is not posthuman either. It is profoundly humanist. As a consequence, it will also be naturalized. The rationalist mind determined by its anthropocentrism in the last instance will unavoidably mimic and reproduce nature. Therefore, in spite of the commitment to hybridization, it will never be inhuman or monstrous. The inhuman is that which escapes rational conceptualization, that which has no meaning or reason for existence: senseless, brute existence, mere matter regardless of whether it is organic or artificially produced.

The technological extension and the biological body are both alien to subjectivity, which is essentially and unavoidably a philosophical creation. In other words, subjectivity is always already philosophical. It is nothing but the automaton of signification which represents the human or constitutes it as representation; what makes it (non)human is precisely its failure to fully represent. Technology precedes subjectivity—just as the body does—and it cannot, therefore, have an ontological status—it is prephilosophical. It precedes it as *téchne* (τέχνη) precedes *philosophia* (φιλοσοφία). It is the real vis-à-vis the subject of language. The hybridization of the two constitutes a category of society or the “species being” of humanity. Perfecting the imperfect nature—because “irrational”—cannot be its purpose since the idea that nature contains meaning or sense, that is, a certain *causa finalis*, is theological-philosophical. In order for something to be susceptible to perfecting, it should contain the

tendency to be perfect. Minimally, it should be grounded in the possibility to constitute a meaning, a purpose. It should contain a *telos*, that is, it should be a theological category.

A Marxist position with regard to technology is a non-philosophical one. That is why Marxist science does not envisage an ontological status for technology. According to the historical and materialist (without philosophical materialism) science of Marxism, technology is a function of the social reproduction of the species-being (of humanity). Technology represents one of the two constituents of the radical and nonhuman dyad as the determination-in-the-last-instance of humanity. As it is a social function it does not constitute an ontological substance. In metaphysical terms, it is not *ousia* but something closer to *tropos*. That is why, in the last instance, technology is the prosthesis of the organic. Together they represent a nonhierarchically constructed radical (= dialectically insolvable) duality as the determination of the species-being.

Contemporary capitalism is enabled by the absolute rule of pure speculation over the inhuman or the nonhuman kernel, not just the physical. However, the organic or the physical is the component of the inhuman binary that is fully objectivized and unilaterally exploited with technological means. It is exploited by the automated capitalist speculation by means of technology, rather than by “technology itself.” It also alienates the technological from the species-being in order to exert violent exploitation of the physical in the form of “resource,” either as labor force or as mere material to be used in industrial mass production. The *realization* of automated reason is surplus value and, in a more optimistic variant, simply value. In other words, its realization is yet another category of the specular, that is, of value. Speculative automated reason is essentially philosophical and exploitative *of the physical or the organic, regardless of whether it is naturally created or synthetic*. It does not have existence outside the self-enveloped and philosophically determined reality of the speculative mind or automation out of joint.

2. ALIENATION OF LABOR THROUGH ABSTRACTION

The value of commodities is the very opposite of the coarse materiality of their substance, not an atom of matter enters into its composition.

—Karl Marx, *Capital*

Marx unmasks the complete lack of materiality as the condition for determination-in-the-last-instance of commodity qua commodity. The product of human labor assumes the status of a commodity only when it is absolutely detached from its physicality.

There is a physical relation between physical things. But it is different with commodities. There, the existence of the things *quâ* commodities, and the value relation between the products of labour which stamps them as commodities, have absolutely no connection with their physical properties and with the material relations arising.¹

The production and exchange of commodities is grounded in an estrangement from the physical. The estrangement first takes place in the form of the exploitation of human labor as physicality; and then in a second gesture, by way of entering the endless (or circular) chain of exchange of values, it assumes the status of a commodity. The second gesture would not be possible without the first. There is a direct causal relation between the two. The abstraction from the physical and its specular recreation as a sign, or a value—ergo a commodity—is the determination-in-the-last-instance of capitalism and philosophy. Such a gesture of abstraction is fundamentally political—it is a sovereign’s act of instituting a law and a reality stemming from that law. It is an act of instituting a reality as an act of substituting the “imperfect” and meaningless (*viz.*, imperfect) real. In short, I refer—as Marx did previously—to the legislating function of abstraction, not the cognitive faculty of abstract thinking. In capitalism, the latter has been extended into a plane of metaphysics and transformed into an ideological instrument. It has, thus, been recreated according to philosophy and can no longer be theoretically or scientifically approached according to the norms of cognitive science, in particular psychology. Abstraction-as-capitalism is an acceleration of the determination-in-the-last-instance of philosophy, as defined by Laruelle—the amphibology that is established between truth and the real in the form of “the Being” (*to òn*).²

Abstraction as the determination-in-the-last-instance of all commodities, and of the circulation of commodity as pure value (or “surplus” value) is enabled by the exploitation of human labor, which, in its turn, is always physical.

The mystical character of commodities does not originate, therefore, in their use value. Just as little does it proceed from the nature of the determining factors of value. For, in the first place, however varied the useful kinds of labour, or productive activities, may be, it is a physiological fact, that they are functions of the human organism, and that each such function, whatever may be its nature or form, is essentially the expenditure of human brain, nerves, muscles, &c.³

It seems that exploitation is in essence and unavoidably “fetishistic” (in the sense used by Marx in the first volume of *Capital*) insofar as it is the effect of abstraction directed against the physical. Immediate needs that are expressed in and satisfied through the so-called use-value of a product are in the last instance physical, including when they primarily concern the “mind” (or brain and nerves). Only if these physical needs are sacrificed, and if they become

subject to the holocaust of speculation (economic but also philosophical), is a commodity created, and with it the possibility of surplus value.

A close reading of most of Marx's seminal texts discloses a repeated and consistent stance according to which exploitation is *always already* carried out by the speculative and the abstract against the physical, or the real and/or the material (all three terms are used by Marx interchangeably). This argument constitutes the core of his critique of fetishism. It is also, I would argue, the grounding epistemic position of his entire oeuvre. All questions that do not depart from the real of existence, or simply from the lived, are ill posed and lead toward speculation based on the procedure of abstraction.

Your question is itself a product of abstraction. Ask yourself how you arrived at that question. Ask yourself whether your question is not posed from a standpoint to which I cannot reply, because it is wrongly put. Ask yourself whether that progress as such exists for a reasonable mind. When you ask about the creation of nature and man, you are abstracting, in so doing, from man and nature. You postulate them as *non-existent*, and yet you want me to prove them to you as *existing*. Now I say to you: Give up your abstraction and you will also give up your question.⁴

The "material" that Marx invokes as the authority in the last instance of every operation of thought, which seeks to establish accurate knowledge of reality, is "material" insofar as it is "physical," "sensuous," and "real." It is unequivocally stated so in Marx's first thesis on Feuerbach:

The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism—that of Feuerbach included—is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the object or of contemplation, but not as a sensuous human activity, practice, not subjectively. Hence, in contradistinction to materialism, the active side was developed abstractly by idealism—which, of course, does not know real, sensuous activity as such.⁵

Human activity, particularly human subjectivity, is not reducible to physical activity. In the above quote Marx resorts to such terms as "the thing," "reality," and "practice," as different names for the same referent. Physicality only vouches that the object of cognition is not an abstraction: that it is anchored in the real.

3. MARX'S REALISM AND THE STATUS OF MATERIALISM IN IT

In his "Theses on Feuerbach," Marx argues for a materialism that is not the product of an idea one can find in the history of philosophy. What Marx

advocates is a particular kind of materialism that is not philosophical, one that is not the product of operations of abstraction, or that is detached from and oppositional to the physical. Rather, he strives to create a science of humanity's "species-being" that is determined-in-the-last-instance by the immediacy of an experienced reality. Countering and transcending the experience of suffering caused by alienation is the goal that Marx's political project seeks to attain. Materialism is merely a form of realism for Marx; he argues for it insofar as it departs from "the thing"⁶ and the "sensuous human activity, practice."⁷ The antithesis between matter and idea here is also one imposed by abstract—or philosophical—contemplation. The goal of humanity then, according to Marx, should be emancipation from all forms of oppression and subjugation. This depends on the abolishment of antitheses established by the "abstract" or "false consciousness." It can be accomplished by rooting thought in practice, or in the real.

We see how subjectivity and objectivity, spirituality and materiality, activity and suffering, lose their antithetical character, and—thus their existence as such antitheses only within the framework of society; we see how the resolution of the *theoretical* antitheses is *only* possible in a *practical* way, by virtue of the practical energy of man. Their resolution is therefore by no means merely a problem of understanding, but a *real* problem of life, which *philosophy* could not solve precisely because it conceived this problem as *merely* a theoretical one.⁸

The chief concern of Marxism is ensuring realism rather than materialism. Transcending intraindividual and interindividual alienation is—Marx puts very explicitly—about abolishing the opposition between "spirituality" and "materiality." The opposition itself—or the "antithesis"—is "merely a theoretical one." The use of "theoretical" here has the same function as that of "philosophy" in Laruelle's non-philosophy or non-standard philosophy.

4. A SOCIALIST REAPPROPRIATION OF ALIENATION: THE REAL OF JOY AND SUFFERING IN THE GROUNDING SLIT

In non-philosophy, enjoyment and suffering no longer establish opposition. They are both instances of the *lived*, of the sheer experience that takes place as "suffering," in the etymological sense of the Latin word *passio*. One is subjected to a sensation, be it pleasure or pain, which takes place in the defenseless body through the instance of pure exposure and vulnerability. Similarly, Laruelle's "the lived" is called *le joui*, regardless of whether it is the product of the infliction of pain or pleasure. "It is the undivided (of) pain—yet not determined by it—as the undivided lived of joy, but never their synthesis, not even

immanent.”⁹ The unilateral, mute instance of the lived in Marx’s text is called suffering, regardless of whether it is the result of violence or a sensation of pleasure. “The object is the *manifestation of the human reality* . . . it is human *activity* and human *suffering*, for suffering, humanly considered, is a kind of self-enjoyment of man.”¹⁰ Suffering is self-enjoyment, not because of some vague masochistic inclination, but because it represents a sublimated alienation to which the self belongs intimately. Pain situates us in the real of ourselves. The real is the instance one inhabits prior to any “making sense out of it”; in anteriority vis-à-vis language, it precedes any possibility of abstraction (including that of “abstract activity and a belly”). Laruelle’s “*joui sans jouissance*”¹¹ is one of the “first names” of the real that we all are in the last instance. It is the enjoyed, without the idea of “enjoyment,” without conceptualization or a philosophy of enjoyment, without attaching to it any sort of *value*.

That invasion of sensation, whether undergone as pain or pleasure, is suffering since it entails unmitigated exposure. Without the subject of language that transforms it into representation, phantasm, or ideal, it is helpless passivity. Nonetheless, if the lingual subject introduces abstraction to the extent of causing a sense of estrangement from the real that we are, or the bundle of sensations that each of us is in his/her last instance, we are subjugated and repressed, since we are detached from our most immediate physical needs. Abstraction or self-subjugation by philosophy is the only means through which we can become accomplices in our subjugation with others.

According to Laruelle’s nonstandard psychoanalysis—operating with the “transcendental material” of Lacan’s psychoanalysis—the instance of the “Stranger” (or the process of estrangement as presubjectivization) is unavoidable and necessary in order to mediate the traumatic immediacy of the real. Laruelle says: “The Strangers are radical subjectivities,” rather than “persons, individuals or subjects in the technical transcendental sense of the word.”¹² Laruelle’s stranger is made of “transcendental material” since it is a form of subjectivity, or the product of language (regardless of how transcendently minimal). Nonetheless, it also is radical since it is experienced as a “point of exteriority” at the heart of the real. Unlike Lacan’s barred subject, radical subjectivity—namely the stranger (as defined by Laruelle)—possesses a “concrete body” or “flesh,” one consisting of the “multitudes of transcendental material.”¹³ Thus, the experience of estrangement, which is an instance of suffering that takes place through the real that we are, must not be erased through a double abstraction—that is, an abstraction of and alienation from the presubjective and the founding experience of estrangement (of subjectivity). The process of alienation from the immediacy of the real—through the instance of the stranger or radical subjectivity—introduces the trauma of the foundational split. The pain of that unavoidable split is inalienable; it takes place in or as the real.

If recognized as a dyad that is constituted by thought's unilateral position with respect to the real and by the indifferent (to thought) unilaterality of the real, and if this dyad is radically determined as such, the instance of alienation remains an exteriority. To radically determine the dyad as such and think it and its constitutive elements in terms of this radicalization is to perform an act of "dualysis," which is the founding methodological procedure of non-philosophy (and/or of non-standard philosophy). In that way, thought is not collapsed into and surreptitiously identified with the real of the pain that is caused by the experience of auto-alienation, namely the primordial split. "Dualysis," in Laruelle's terminology, is a procedure of unilateral affirmation of the dyad.¹⁴ The nonabstractionist (or non-philosophical) recognition of the grounding alienation of the Self is radical, that is, it does not introduce a philosophical double of the reality of alienation that would constitute a modern subjectivity.

5. AUTO-ACCELERATION OF CAPITALISM AS SPECULATION AND THE AUTOMATON OF SIGNIFICATION (PRODUCTION OF VALUE)

According to Marx in Volume 3 of *Capital*, the inherent laws of the capitalist political and economic order will nourish and exacerbate the contradiction between pure speculation as the primary mode of operation of capitalism and the material it aims to control and exploit. Speculation is production of representation, or of value including both surplus and use-value, whereby the latter—insofar as it is a value, that is, an estimation, rather than the practice of use—is just a derivative of "surplus value." Value is always surplus value even when anchored in the practice of use. The automaton of signification—value creation—is unstoppable and self-sufficient, whereas the intervention of the real (or the mere material) is an intrusion of the senseless into the automated production of sense, namely value. Speculation out of joint will assume a life of its own, detached from the material possession of capital as private property or as simply having actual money. Speculative capital, the capital with which the finance industry operates today, is potential money, pure speculation.¹⁵

Contemporary finance capital, or the so-called finance industry, relies and profits from the operations of circulation as a process *per se* and as tautology, divorced from any grounding in the material basis of capital. The "capital" of the contemporary finance industry is "information," "knowledge," and political power.¹⁶ According to Marx, such a development is necessary and inevitable as the last stage of capitalism producing a "new financial aristocracy, a new variety of parasites in the shape of promoters, speculators and simply nominal directors; a whole system of swindling and cheating by means of

corporation promotion, stock issuance, and stock speculation. It is private production without the control of private property.”¹⁷ This stage is metastatic for capitalism, ensuing into the greatest and most productive contradiction that should lead to self-dissolution.

What our contemporary media and corporate political powers call “crisis” seems to be, by all of its constitutive characteristics, the final stage of capitalism which Marx describes as “self-dissolving.” It unveils the reality of economic production and social and technological progress as unfolding virtually independently from the “material basis” (monetarily represented materiality) of private capital.

The acceleration process, which is bound to happen through what Marx called “the credit system,” the ever-growing distance between actual paying and buying of a commodity, and the possibility of an ever-expanding “intermission” of the credit period, divulges the spectrality of capital, money, and private property. Acceleration through the “credit system” as the final stage of capitalism is announced and elaborated by Marx in Volume 3, Chapter 5 of *Capital*. As the US Government Report on the 2008 financial crisis shows, Wall Street CEOs do not have to invest any *real* or *actual* private property, and practically no capital of theirs has to be invested in order to initiate, manage, and profit. Quite the contrary, it is the private property of the poor that had been invested and then defaulted as the post 2007 crisis occurred. By no material investment of one’s own investment, “industrialists” create an unstoppable growing capital that enables them and the government to control the society as the highest form of politico-economic power. The illusion of capital’s materiality and material property, serving as the basis for an economy, has become apparent through the financial speculation whose final form has come down to sheer swindling. Albeit aiming only at pure profit and exploitation of the poor, the crisis has also unwittingly shown that the “emperor had been naked” for quite some time—that capital as the material and real basis of economic processes is a mirage. On the basis of this particular contradiction, the “stock exchange managers” have managed to amass most of the material resources for themselves.

Acceleration is immanent to capitalism. Capitalism is unstoppably accelerated by the inherent laws of speculation itself, and therefore that of dematerialization.

On one hand, the acceleration is technical; *for example*, with the same magnitude and number of actual turnovers of commodities for consumption, a smaller quantity of money or money tokens performs the same service. This is bound up with the technique of banking. On the other hand, credit accelerates the velocity of the metamorphoses of commodities, and thereby the velocity of

money circulation. . . . Acceleration by means of credit, of the individual phases of circulation or the metamorphosis of commodities, later the metamorphosis of capital, and with it an acceleration of the process of reproduction in general. (On the other hand, credit helps to keep the acts of buying and selling apart longer, and serves thereby as a basis for speculation.) Contraction of reserve funds, which may be viewed in two ways: as a reduction of the circulating medium on the one hand, and, on the other, as a reduction of that part of capital which must always exist in the form of money.¹⁸

Acceleration does not take place in the form of finance capital only, but also in the area of material production, that is, in technological-militaristic development. The unstoppable development of the means of production, which is also the means of exploitation of the (non)human and animal species, is constantly accelerated. It's called technological development. Technological development is subject to private property, its goal is the creation of surplus value; inventions are in the possession of capitalist oligarchs exclusively. The imagined political revolution via technological acceleration requires a reversed model of ownership and reinvention of the social role of technological development. In order to achieve these goals, following the model of associations of producers advocated by Marx, the technological processes should be appropriated by the actual producers. As a consequence, this will lead to a replacement of the spectrality and superfluity of capital (money) by real and tangible social reproduction.

In what Marx announces as the late stage of capitalism, that is, in finance capitalism, the process of signification—of turning a material, physical good into market value or commodity—is mainly carried out through mere “swindling.” In this process, the “private ownership of property” has been proven to be “just ownership” as Marx predicted—a mere instance of the material to be exploited by the “stock exchange managers.” As the essentially speculative nature of the capitalist economy has accelerated, the central contradiction has moved to an extreme. According to Marx, the contradiction taken *in extremis* must be resolved by self-dissolving the impossible, unsustainable, contradicting couple. If the unsustainable and bubbled up speculative aspect of the contradiction culminates, if it exacerbates the fissure with the real and the physical that it introduced *in principio*, it will founder as the real starts to “act on its own,” escaping the control of philosophy (= ideology of capitalism). Unruly as it is, thanks to its brutal, physical force, and/or the force of the real, which can include material actions carried out by inanimate agencies, it will disperse the ruling webs of meaning, or the existing universe consisting of “estimation of values.” Such a process would lead to the self-dissolution of the founding binary of capitalism, because *the reality is constituted by, grounded in, and conditioned by social process, rather than*

capital investment (in the form of actual monetary assets). The materiality of contemporary reality lies in society, in its physicality and the effects of a conditioning real, rather than in the symbolism of money.

NOTES

1. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. 1: The Process of Production of Capital*, ed. Frederick Engels, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1887), accessed on April 18, 2015, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch01.htm#S4>.

2. Laruelle, *Philosophy et non-philosophie* (Liège-Bruxelles: Pierre Mardaga, 1989), 232.

3. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. 1: The Process of Production of Capital*, accessed on March 30, 2016.

4. Marx, "The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof," in *Capital, Vol. 1*, ed. Karl Marx, accessed on March 30, 2016.

5. Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," in *The German Ideology*, trans. Roy Pascal, ed. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1938), accessed on March 20, 2016, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/theses/>.

6. Karl Marx, "Third Manuscript: Private Property and Communism," in *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, ed. Karl Marx, accessed on March 30, 2016, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/comm.htm>.

7. Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," accessed on March 30, 2016.

8. Marx, *Private Property and Communism* in Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, accessed on March 30, 2016.

9. François Laruelle, *Théorie des Etrangers: Science des hommes, démocratie et nonpsychanalyse* (Paris: Editions Kimé, 1995), 225.

10. Marx, *Private Property and Communism*, accessed on March 30, 2016.

11. Laruelle, *Théorie des Etrangers*, 222.

12. Laruelle, *Théorie des Etrangers*, 166: "Concrètement les Etrangers ne sont pas des personnes, des individus ou des sujets au sens philosophique transcendant de ces mots; ce sont bien de toute façon des subjectivités radicales, mais en dernière instance; et ce qui leur tien lieu de corps—de corps transi par cette subjectivité—, est de l'ordre de ces entités sans différence et tissées dans la transcendance du vide."

13. Laruelle, *Théorie des Etrangers*, 166: "On peut appeler 'chair' les Multitudes transcendantales=X"

14. Laruelle, *Philosophie et non-philosophie*, 93–95.

15. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. 3: The Process of Capitalist Production: Interest and Profit of Enterprise*, ed. Frederick Engels (New York: International Publishers, 1894), *Marxist Internet Archive* (1996, 1999; 2010), accessed on April 17, 2015, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1894-c3/ch23.htm>.

16. Financial Crisis Inquiry Commission (FCIC), *The Financial Crisis Inquiry Report: Final Report of the National Commission on the Causes of the Financial and*

Economic Crisis in the United States (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office, 2011).

17. Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 3, accessed on March 20, 2016.

18. *Ibid.*, accessed on March 30, 2016.

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