

When the author is the patriarchy. The art dematerialization: from public art to cyberfeminism

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ABSTRACT

From 70s, many women artists started to break up their relation with the conventional art system and its recognition process. Women artists compelled by feminism and other social groups created their art project out of this model. As it seems, at the beggining they were not worried about being included or not in the art circuit. Otherwise they proposed deep changes in relation with traditional art system as authorship pattern.

Following generations continue the same statement looking for emancipation. Nowadays this outsider movement is in relation with the same main goals formulated 50 years before.

This research is based upon personal testimonies from artists living these changes. They explain their creative process and their relationship with institutions. Their analyses are key factors to determine the authorship multiple parameters. This will be the focus of the article.

TAGS

New gender of Public Art, Activist Art, Cyberfeminism, Collaborative Art; Community Art

When the author is the patriarchy¹

There is a crucial fact which is unequivocally understood by audiences, artists, theorists and institutions alike, and which relates to the link between a work's authorship, the ability to conceptualise through the author's figure as artist-creator and, using this as a reference point, their consignment or not to the history of art.

Control over this hugely symbolic archive has traditionally been held by men. They have decided for centuries which works of art and which artists should define the iconic *status quo* represented by art and which thus suits the patriarchy² and their forms of social power. In fact, research and more rigorous attributions of authorship have in recent times changed the attributions of works by Artemisia Gentileschi and Sofonisba Anguissola, to mention but two examples of painters whose paintings were for centuries attributed to male artists.

This prospect was first raised back in 1971 by Linda Nochlin with her founding essay on the critique of feminist art, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" where she offers an enlightening explanation of the concepts of "Genius" and "Great Artist" in relation to masculinity and a specific view on the clear patriarchal failure to question the history of art. Nochlin specifically identifies what she calls a romantic and elitist substructure which seeks to bolster certain individuals who are in almost every case white, western males³.

This has encouraged individuals from various generations of artists, as we will see, to move beyond the conventional framework of the world of art and to generate both new creative models and works, or consequently different ways of establishing authorship or dealing with cultural institutions. Nochlin herself in the same essay states that one of the reasons for the lack of great women artists is the very way in which these institutions and structures work, imposing a specific view of reality on society. The inertia fostered by women's submission to men, as the author explains, is so strong that any departure is seen as unnatural. She also affirms that male artists are obviously not going to renounce their privileges, which means that there is a clear need to explore new avenues.

¹ The project "From the Feminist Upheaval to Public Art and the Cyberspace: The Far West of Opportunities" led by Elena García-Oliveros was publicly funded with money from the research support programmes at Intermediae Matadero Madrid, Centro de Arte Contemporáneo del Ayuntamiento de Madrid (*the Madrid City Council Contemporary Art Centre*), during the years 2014, 2015 and 2016.

² The patriarchy is taken to mean the dominance of the criterion of man vs subordinate woman, as much in private as in public, and where traditional values instilled by this practice throughout history prevail.

³ Linda NOCHLIN, "From 1971: Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?", *Artnews* (June 2015). <http://www.artnews.com/2015/05/30/why-have-there-been-no-great-women-artists/> [

We will see through the feedback from artists participating in the study how institutions continue to use the same traditional parameters and how differences in treatment, resources allocated or lesser notoriety given to authorship by certain social groups remains marked. Given this reality, artists have reacted on occasions with sabotage, defection or reformulation: all of which are creative strategies adopted by artists seeking to deny this power. Questioning the notion of authorship, a key and sensitive issue in legitimising art, has become a political attitude which has both directly and indirectly encouraged this dissidence.

Experiments carried out by groups of feminist artists in the 1970s are key in this analysis due to the various issues relating to their collaborative methodologies for artistic intervention, to the exhibition of their works in non-prominent parts of museums or, furthermore, to how all of this is at odds with a traditional authorship model focused on the monetarizable recognition of a sole author and a sole work. In 2013, Preciado drew on the 1974 documentary by Johanna Demetrakas about experiments in the *Womanhouse*⁴, to formulate an analysis which suggests how this artistic project relates to the institutional critique fuelled by many artists and which here is extended to the relationship between the university, the museum, the domestic sphere and the body⁵ (Plate 1).



Plate 1: Performance at Womanhouse

Juan Vicente Aliaga uses the research in his book, *Phallic Order*, to illustrate the context for us:

The different processes adopted in hegemonic practices obeyed formal motivations, [...], they

⁴ Womanhouse (January 30 – February 28, 1972) was a feminist art installation and performance space organized by Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro. The Feminist Art Program, was slated to occupy a building to embrace the vision of a new kind of female centered art.

⁵ Beatriz PRECIADO, “Volver a la Womanhouse”, Jeu de Paume blog *Peau de Rat*
<http://lemagazine.jeudepaume.org/blogs/beatrizpreciado/2013/10/03/volver-a-la-womanhouse/>

constituted the cornerstone of artistic language and the only modern art blessed by the New York altars, growing into a neo-imperialist version [...]. With these imposing parameters, in a world of mass-consumerism which was beginning to yield new gods and idols, art with gender components would need to find new outlets, fresh alternative spaces to commercial callousness [...]

In the transition between the sixties and seventies, [...], androcentric structures and the phallic order were questioned with unexpected steadfastness. We are now facing a paradigm shift. Both in terms of social mobilization and in terms of the space for theoretical reflection, critique of the patriarchal system is constant and has an egalitarian purpose: put an end to the violence generated by and reflected in the submission and subordination of women. [...]

In artistic practices [...] language is channelled through new and experimental techniques and processes, for which there are no male models to follow [...]. And which encourage symbolically breaking down patriarchal structures using minority artistic media with a limited reach⁶.

But at this moment in time, this censorship, which is viewed as a serious discrepancy in the recognition process, is no longer faceless, and neither is the public unfamiliar with its processes. This take on the issue comes from American artist Suzanne Lacy who, during an interview with us in 2012, explained: “By censorship I really mean gradual repression, the “silent deprivation of recognition” which surrounds ideas”.

The feminist perspective unites, including in the art world, a whole corpus which describes the form that the patriarchy takes in this specific environment. The three pillars which underpin what we could call high art would be authorship, the work, and its audience. The market develops specific designations and *modus operandi* in each case: identifiable conventional authorship, a single work with a recognised monetary value and an audience-consumer as a passive spectator. As we shall see in this analysis, feminist art has sought over the past decades to question each of these elements in order to destroy once and for all this core link: this model of authorship which is linked to the patriarchy itself. It was artist Shu Lea Cheang herself, a key participant in the research project behind this article, who first came up with the metaphor of sabotaging “the Big Daddy mainframe”.

Introduction to the study and context of this article

Why, since the 70s, have certain groups of artists decided to capitalise on movements aimed at breaking with the traditional art system? What does the gender struggle have to do with this choice? Why is challenging the concept of authority significant in this particular revolution? What change would follow nearly four decades on? How would they negotiate with cultural institutions and what role would they have in this process of change?

⁶ Juan Vicente ALIAGA, *Orden fálico*. Madrid, Akal, 2007, pp. 212, 257, 259.

These are some of the questions raised in the essay developed by Toxic Lesbian⁷, *From the Feminist Upheaval to Public Art and the Cyberspace: The Far West of Opportunities*, using a qualitative methodology, based on personal interviews carried out during public events with the artists who drove this change. Their stories are brought to life with the help of open interviews with the institutions that play a role in consolidating their proposals. University students participated in these specially-created events, starting a discussion with each artist, as well as with specialist researchers like Remedios Zafra⁸ in the case of research on Shu Lea Cheang⁹, María ptqk¹⁰ for Faith Wilding¹¹ and Gloria G. Durán for Suzanne Lacy¹². Discussion groups were also created with analysts representing the institutions, feminism in the cultural context and from universities to help piece together the life stories of the artists interviewed¹³.

The objectives of this research are firstly to establish a link between questioning the current conventional art system from a feminist perspective and by female artists, and the patriarchal values which supposedly underpin the latter. This critical approach focuses on the specific case of cyberfeminism¹⁴, through the eyes of one of its main exponents: Shu Lea Cheang. Secondly, it also

⁷Elena García-Oliveros is a visual artist and teacher. In 2005 she created Toxic Lesbian (<http://www.toxiclesbian.org>) and took on the pseudonym of Elena Tóxica. She has developed projects in collaboration with artistic and cultural institutions such as Intermediae, El Ranchito and Medialab de Matadero, the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (*Reina Sofía Museum*) in Madrid, Círculo de Bellas Artes (*Fine Arts Circle*), Tabacalera, Patio Maravillas and La Casa Encendida in Madrid, the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Castilla y León (*Castilla y León Museum of Contemporary Art*), Arteleku de Donosti, Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo de Sevilla (*Seville's Contemporary Art Centre*), Medialab iMAL in Brussels and Medialab Public Art in Berlin, amongst others. Whilst carrying out her projects she has worked with organisations such as Amnesty International, CEAR, Women's Link Worldwide and ILGA World, amongst other feminist organisations, organisations advocating LGBTQI rights and defending mental health. Furthermore, she has worked with individuals, activists and artists.

⁸ Remedios Zafra is a writer and Art teacher at the Sevilla University (Spain), specialized on Gender and Ciberculture

⁹ Shu Lea Cheang (<http://mauvaiscontact.info/>) Shu Lea Cheang is a multimedia artist who works in the fields of net-based installation, social interface and film production.

¹⁰ Maria ptqk (<http://www.mariaptqk.net/>) is an independent researcher and cultural producer. In 2013 curated *Soft Power* with cyberfeminists artists like Faith Wilding or *queer* writers like Paul Preciado.

¹¹ Faith Wilding -<http://faithwilding.refugia.net/>- is an American artist of Paraguayan origin who worked with other female artists during the 70s to create new collaborative art practices based on feminism. Subsequently she would go on to develop her work within cyberfeminism, creating Subrosa <http://www.cyberfeminism.net/>- where her authorship is part of the collective and activist approaches..

¹² The political upheavals and experimental tendencies in art during the 1960s and 70s, produced important changes at the avant-garde movements. The American artist Suzanne Lacy (<http://www.suzannelacy.com/>) emerged during these changes. Basic aspects concerning creation were modified: the concept of art, art as object, the authorship, or considerations about the audience. A new utopia was born: art could be made in collaboration and dialogue in a deep relation with human life. In the first years of the 1990s, some artists and art critics laid the foundations for what would be called a New Genre of Public Art. This breakup bears a close relation to the feminist movement, insofar as it generated a reflection about everyday life, gender structures, social structures or people's equality. California was one of the places where the change started and this experimentation was perceived by many women looking for other models to create and show their art works.

¹³ More information at <http://toxiclesbian.org/research-project/?lang=en>

¹⁴ The term cyberfeminism is broad and culturally covers different manifestations. Initially defined as a movement under the influence of the third feminist wave, especially inspired by Donna Haraway with her "A Cyborg Manifesto" from 1987, it brought together artists such as pioneers VNS Matrix with the idea that the use of technologies involves subverting masculine identity and could support change to gender roles. Its fundamental political involvement takes place online and subsequently has led to various understandings of the phenomenon from a feminist perspective. Cheang does not identify with this cyberfeminist utopia but does see herself within what is known as Boix, de Miguel <http://www.mujiresentred.net/IMG/pdf/ciberfeminismo-demiguel-boix.pdf>- "cyberfeminist social artists".

seeks to describe the historical change which was started in the 70s by women who were influential in generating a revolutionary cultural model: new genre public art, demonstrated by the life story of artist Suzanne Lacy, to connect this with the cyberfeminist artists working up to now. This course of action which sought to drive change within the art system, was triggered by the same concerns and desire for a paradigm shift, which in turn was fuelled by a context deemed oppressive by the artists who took part in this study.

The study therefore articulates the consequences for the art system in the shape of paradigm shifts. It also seeks to relate these facts to feminist struggles, to the often discriminatory perceptions which stem from the behaviour of institutions or the cultural system which legitimises art.

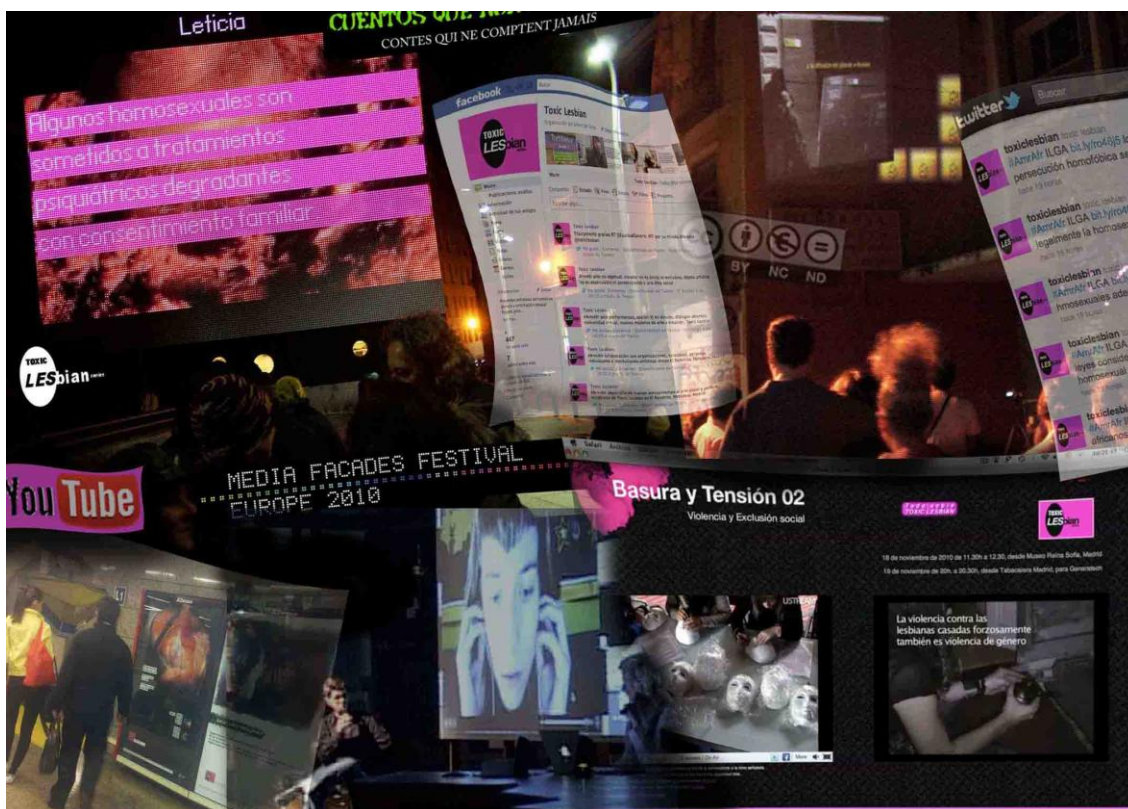


Plate 2: Public art and Cyberfeminism, the artistic model of Toxic Lesbian

The utopia of the democratisation of art

The case of American artist Suzanne Lacy is highly illustrative of the core issue of this article, due to the path which was first forged back in those rebellious 1970s, when groups of feminist female artists would attend demonstrations such as collaborative art, community art or even what came to be known as new genre public art. In conversations with Lacy (plates 2 and 3), she explained the origin of the concept of “democratisation of art” something called for by many different artists:

There is great interest in social practices and in the way these interact. Although these appear across the world at different points and moments, I think that the current wave of social practice stems from works from the seventies; and some of these, although not all of them, were feminist. Part of this, as I have experienced in the United States and the United Kingdom, was a drive towards the so-called "democratisation of art".

At that time there was pressure to increase audiences. There were also, especially in California, many people of colour and from working-class backgrounds being admitted into the university system for the first time. As they did so, they created art which reflected their sensitivity.

I would say that, from the precise moment in time when art was dematerialised, people began to wonder about the nature of artistic creation: they considered the extension of this beyond the walls of museums. People were talking about feminism, context, ethnicity and national and cultural identities. Art was becoming less universal and more specific; the audience was becoming less generic and elitist and more general. At the same time museums were pushing for broader ideas: they needed to increase their core audience.¹⁵



Plate 3: Encounter with Suzanne Lacy at Matadero Contemporary Art Center, Madrid (Spain)

This trend was to trigger an entire wave of change, which would see participation for different reasons not only from artists but also audiences, invited to participate and generate artistic projects, as well as new trends within institutions which, as we shall see, would act in a way which

¹⁵ Toxic Lesbian Open dialogues with Suzanne Lacy Podcast <http://toxiclesbian.org/research-project/?lang=en>

was both conservative and sometimes at odds with the very thing they were supposed to support. As Lacy explained to us in 2012, museums themselves began to show interest in opening up, in reaching out to a less passive public in different ways, more willing partners in the transformations artists had asked them to undergo. When, in 2014, we asked how she thought art institutions had changed through her work, she replied:

I think that there has been a move towards reforming institutions. This is what we have seen happening over the past 30 years [...]. I think that adopting genuine social practices is very difficult for institutions. I don't think they understand commitments unless they come from intimate and very restricted milieux [...]. I think that there is a tendency to separate the exhibition and artistic side of the museum from the educational side and the former still prevails over the latter in art institutions.

We can see in these words spoken by the veteran artist how this supposed democratisation would enter through the back door, both in terms of conceptualising the change which the museum was willing to make and on a purely budgetary level. These projects would only be given limited space on the schedule, whilst conventional models of authorship would represent and continue to account for the majority of their activity. Perhaps such intense questioning of the various symbolic structures linked to authorship has led Lacy, as in the next case we shall look at relating to Cheang, to decide not to have her name removed from her art, thus not entering into even more breakaway collective authorship movements. Lacy supposedly describes herself unequivocally as a single artist, whether this enters into the patriarchal academy of the time's precepts or not. But it is precisely this personal attitude which has forced the institutions who have embraced her to, as we shall see later, assert her position as an "artist" like any other recognised as such by audiences. Another clear example of this same ambiguous attitude can be found in the words of Shu Lea Cheang:

I can't say for sure that feminist artistic practices have changed some of the institutions' ways of exhibiting. [...]

Without a doubt, the artist's name as a brand, the market value and the minutiae of this environment are already something of an obsession in the art world. [...]

I feel increasingly alienated from the institutions. The process of making a project a success and securing funding takes planning and negotiating time. [...]. Now I participate in smaller-scale exhibitions where I'm able to make suggestions and have an input in how they are created¹⁶.

During the cybermeeting held at Intermediae, Matadero Madrid in 2016 with the participation of university students¹⁷ (plates. 4 and 5), Cheang revealed that the inclusion of their

¹⁶ Interview with Shu Lea Cheang at <http://toxiclesbian.org/research-project/?lang=en>

¹⁷ 12th of February, 2016, encounter with Shu Lea Cheang at Intermediae Matadero, Madrid (Spain), Matadero Contemporary Art Center. The video and full transcription at <http://toxiclesbian.org/research-project/?lang=en>

iconic *Brandon* in the emerging *net.art* collection of New York's Guggenheim Museum in 1998 also happened in a somewhat “unorthodox” way: “In the end there was no actual purchase, they didn't pay me any money for that piece. I think I recall them paying me a dollar, to tell the truth, but it became something of a symbolic payment gesture”¹⁸.



Plate 4: Encounter with Shu Lea Cheang at Matadero Contemporary Art Center, Madrid (Spain)

Cheang, heavily involved in their capacity as a cinema director, a medium through which they come and go over the course of their public art projects, which are very often nurtured to produce their own filmography, also never considered removing their own stamp from their works, in spite of developing collaborative working strategies, including with other artists. Their field of creative work is mixed, with cultural constraints which in their case are given more media coverage due more to the specifics of audiovisual production than to the often highly speculative metalanguage of the art world. Nevertheless, in some of their projects they did adopt authorship approaches which broke significantly with the most outdated schools of thought amongst museum academics, such as the use of copyleft licences.

¹⁸ Transcription at <http://toxiclesbian.org/research-project/?lang=en>



Plate 5: Encounter with Shu Lea Cheang at Matadero Contemporary Art Center, Madrid (Spain)

We can see therefore that the works created by these kinds of artists are met with a combination of flippancy and a complete lack of a framework enabling institutions to truly recognise their authorship and work. This raises the prospect that behind all of this is a questioning of the cornerstones of the institutionalised art system, and of course a typically large number of people who doubt their ability to assimilate.

Although a slow and gradual change by museums and art galleries has been observed and we have to a certain extent seen an opening up to new models of collaborative creation (those whereby artists allow audiences to gain access to the production of artworks) on exhibition schedules, this kind of art work is still viewed as secondary by museums. This is how Lacy describes it: "The art world may have embraced the ways of working that I described in my writing in the 70s, but this has not trickled down to awards and recognition bodies, both of which are still largely male-dominated."¹⁹

This "democratisation of art" paves the way for artists who represent a different kind of society, where people other than white, western and heterosexual males are also granted access, in contrast with the traditional blueprint of the highly determined artist elite, jealously defended in the archives watched over by the cultural patriarchy. These new horizons also allow for the inclusion of works of art which are no longer unique, as opposed to those whose commercial endorsement by the museum had until now safeguarded their value in accordance with the criteria of capitalist

¹⁹ Transcription at <http://toxiclesbian.org/research-project/?lang=en>

orthodoxy. These other pieces which are beginning to break through respond to their own shifting nature and photos, videos and iconic objects which represent the work are conserved in their memory. Finally, this "democratisation" also entails an opening up to the kinds of authorship brought by these new waves of art, which have more in common with copyleft dissidence or the difficulty of attributing the work when other artists, collectives or spectators have themselves partaken in producing the final "artwork". These are, therefore, the hallmarks of a deep and destructive revolution in the cultural system itself and its markets, which has only reinforced the fears and conflicts of the guardians of the *status quo*.

The new authorship model behind the revolution

When 70s feminist artists began a journey to redefine the profile of the artist, of their work and of the role the audience plays in relation to the performance, they would come up against radical questioning not of their pieces and their message, but of themselves as people. As Lacy told us:

I would say that successful female artists need to build an identity for themselves, just like all artists, but in a very deliberate way. [...] Artists, especially *performance* artists (like me) build their identity over time according to the context in which they gain recognition. [...] *Performance* artists have always been labelled as crazy, weird, extravagant, extremist, narcissistic... [...]

Another thing which was very relevant when *performance* art began in the 70s was gender, because there were many more women involved than in other fields [...] If you went to a painting exhibition there would be significantly fewer women there than men, but if you went to a *performance* art exhibition it could very well be the case that 50% of those present would be women. That's how this field worked in the beginning and a huge number of women gravitated towards *performance* because it was something akin to the "Far West of opportunities".

Nevertheless women built their identities in a complex way because their body was the vector of their artwork. [...] We built our identity as artists at that time, and for me [...] everything had a strong masculine component. In my case this worked in a physiodynamic way because, as I was thinking so much about which genre could begin to take on a "gender" dimension, I realised that, by adopting such characteristics, I could behave in ways traditionally associated with men.²⁰

This change wasn't inconsequential for them as we shall see. Daring as they did to embrace models which were still experimental and unrecognised had many implications. But the transformation had already begun and, as they deepened their reflections, the differences sought in their approaches increased over time, to a point of no return. "New Genre Public Art" is the term coined by Lacy in the reference book *Mapping The Terrain: New Genre Public Art* which she edited in 1995 and which reached out to many of the most important artists and critics of the time, such as

²⁰ Transcription at <http://toxiclesbian.org/research-project/?lang=en>

Judith Baca, Allan Kaprow and Lucy Lippart²¹. In this book she outlined the creative strategies which involved audiences in the production of artworks. Pieces were developed over months, even years, where artists would coexist and collaborate with social collectives affected by the issues covered by the work. A series of different performances were created in this way, including actions, gestures, either recorded using video or photographs and audio, sometimes even working with other artists, to ultimately present all this as the work of a single artist, but not as a single work.

Recently, the prestigious London Tate Modern acquired Lacy's work *Crystal Quilt* as part of its permanent collection. In order to display it they spread the various objects and supports, which illustrated to the audience what the production would have represented when it was created, over several adjacent rooms. The main space housed a huge photograph which represented one of the most significant moments in the major performance Lacy carried out with 430 women in Minneapolis in 1987, as well as the cloth which was symbolic of the work. Next door was another room where you could listen to excerpts of conversations and sound recordings which were included in the piece, and finally different kinds of documentation. Similarly, in 2016 the institution explained on its website to audiences why Lacy was deemed an artist rather than an activist, using her own words and how she identifies herself²². As well as questioning traditional authorship in this work, it also raises the issue of how you differentiate between this kind of work and what would be considered a political action which could have been carried out by a social group committed to this cause in their activism. That is, the Tate Modern had to use its great legitimising machinery to justify why Lacy had become another artist in its collection just like painters such as Mark Rothko and Georgia O'Keeffe, whose identification as artists is never questioned because, amongst other things, their kind of creations fit the *status quo* and such explanations are not required to justify the acquisition of their paintings.

That said, this is the kind of work that Lacy was producing 30 years ago. Whilst its inclusion at London's Tate Modern caused difficulties back then, her current works (just like those of other artists producing similar works) entail greater complexities for which institutions are very probably not prepared in the slightest. Once again, this is not the case with conventional artists, for whom the passing of their most recent work from the gallery where it is on display to museums and art collections is very common. This mechanism contributes to consolidating the value of pieces on the art market.

²¹ Suzanne LACY (ed.), *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art*, Bay Press, Seattle, 1995.

²² "Who is Suzanne Lacy?", 13th of January 2016 article from Tate Modern web published at "Blogs & channel" [on line], <http://bit.ly/2vtnXDW>

Lacy's case illustrates how such projects have evolved. She now brings other players into her artworks, including social networks or companies from the cultural sector such as Creative Time. We shall go on to look at this aspect as well as the influence it could have in terms of understanding authorship. Specifically, in *Between the Door and the Streets* created in 2013, authorship in the traditional sense was literally broken down as we shall see. This drew on the precedent set a year before with *Three weeks in January*. Let's look at some of its implications according to the Californian artist:

[In *Three weeks in January*] we had a load of *bloggers* participating in the *performances*. This influenced the Toxic Lesbian work to some extent²³. We completed a *performance* where people were talking on the upper floor of the town hall and their only audience were *bloggers*; and they published what they observed on their blogs [...]. All activist women in the town came and participated in this *performance*. It was a really direct, face-to-face experiment, as opposed to an experiment carried out over the Internet.²⁴

The artist began therefore to create digital works without becoming immersed in the reality of what cyberfeminism was developing in parallel. However, this led to the creation of online communities over which she had no control, and where online events were not developed by her. This wasn't a problem for her in the context of her own personal experimentation, quite the opposite; it helped go deeper into what all of this meant for her work:

I think the internet is very good - especially the way in which you [Toxic Lesbian] have made use of it- to demonstrate types of connections which are part of the aesthetics of social practice. Whether the web really captures direct commitment or has the same value as sitting down face-to-face with the other person and establishing that special emotional, physical or psychological connection [...] So far they have proven to be two very different things.²⁵

In reality, the problems that using these resources caused for Lacy were related to how they would be received by specialist critics or by the cultural legitimisation system, which could have an impact on her authorship. Her questions related to her audiences, the very body of her art as she herself explained in 2014:

Now we move to 2010 and the very marked prevalence in this generation of communicating via web-based technologies such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, etc. My question was how this

²³ Lacy refers to a collaboration with Toxic Lesbian in 2011 during her Project at Reina Sofia Museum *The Tatooed Skeleton* producing a Internet performance by Toxic Lesbian.

²⁴ Transcription at <http://toxiclesbian.org/research-project/?lang=en>

²⁵ Transcription at <http://toxiclesbian.org/research-project/?lang=en>

incarnation - embodiment - of original disclosures of breaches could lead to something as 'disembodied' as web culture.²⁶

But it would be in *Between the Door and the Streets* where she would go even further in this research, as can be seen in this conversation:

Suzanne Lacy: [...] so I couldn't rely on the online community too much [...] the online community wasn't really that accessible for me because it's a very "discursive" environment, you know?

Toxic Lesbian: To some extent, in the way you have worked on other occasions, with mediators, also when interacting with the online community, you brought together [...] a group of *community managers*. I can imagine that to some extent you held preliminary meetings with those *community managers*, given that they were using their own Twitter and Facebook accounts to communicate with their *followers* and given the style of communication which they had developed. They served to some extent as your vector, your mediator with the online community, didn't they?

Suzanne Lacy: [...] Especially when it came to *Between the Door and the Streets* electronic and online communication wasn't used as part of the work, not like in *Three Weeks in January*. We did make announcements and communicate about the piece but not in a centralised way like the way that Toxic Lesbian does or in the way we did in *Three weeks in January*. [...]

I communicated with a group of ten organisers who, in turn, would go out and communicate with another ten organisers. So, to some extent, although my communication with the *performers* was mediated by people, as in *Three Weeks in January*, communication with those involved in the project was technologically mediated. [...]

Toxic Lesbian: [...] What I'm driving at is, although you say you aren't a social media expert you are, nonetheless, using the profile of others (who do have an online identity) to grow your project and so that this online community can exist.

The fact is, when you look at the traces this project has left behind on the internet [...] you can't tell whether or not it was you who created the *online* community: the reality is that this project generated it. You merely communicated your project to some mediators [...]

Suzanne Lacy: Yes, you're right and many of my dealings with *social media* are beyond my generation. What I was trying to say is that although I might not hold meetings, I still like to have someone in my presence; and that is typical of my generation but also of my personality. The question is what kind of communication and what kind of organisation are produced in different ways. The question is not about technology but about organisation.²⁷

We can see that the artist is concerned by the dialogic limitations of this new tool, by how to increase communication and what implications the use of these new media has for her audiences. However, at no time does she question her own authorship in this way of working. Obviously someone who has used unlegitimised models to act from the outset of their artistic career will have

²⁶ Transcription at <http://toxiclesbian.org/research-project/?lang=en>

²⁷ Transcription at <http://toxiclesbian.org/research-project/?lang=en>

grown accustomed to carving out a path which will allow them, over time, to navigate the institutions.

Another aspect which was to make authorship recognition for use more complex was the advent of major cultural enterprises. In *Between the Door and the Streets* it would be Creative Time that would mediate between the own artist's organisation and the Brooklyn Museum (with the flagship institutional role) and the ramifications that would stem from these kind of structures. In reality, the invitation to develop the project came from Creative Time. They are an international agency specialising in intense social media and online distribution activities. The organisation always links its projects to visual artists, musicians and performers of renown and is responsible, for example, for the image of Manhattan with two powerful beams of light in place of the Twin Towers as an symbol of the 9/11 attacks.

The social mobilisation generated for the project was highly relevant both online and offline, and involved bringing together a group of specialised and varied individuals (made up of journalists, coordinators of social groups, street agents, and *community managers* in the relevant social sectors) working over long periods prior to the event, generating discussion and expectation around the date itself (and also following it), increasing the diversity of digital pieces and building the online community. It was therefore a piece with much broader dimensions and greater media and social repercussions than the artist's previous work, where some aspects of the work went beyond her control and became part of a major event, managed by cultural agents supporting the production of the piece.

Funding came both from the participation of sponsors and from mixed funding environments, public and private, from companies primarily associated with telecommunications or technologies, but also from others who wanted their image to be associated with an innovative concept. The artist described the role of institutions in her most recent projects as follows:

I have been inviting institutions to collaborate since the 70s, but I retained the role of producer of the work. Today this has changed and this is due to the fact that social practice in art is becoming increasingly acceptable. Now, when an institution extends an invitation to me [...] I am merely the organizer. When these organisations invite me to carry out a project and offer funding instead of me having to request it, a series of problems arise which I never have to deal with in the past. And these problems are linked to pre-existing institutional protocols; when I talk about the "Far West", this also meant for my work that I could produce it in a fairly independent way but, of course, the trade-off there was that I had to find the funding and publicise the work myself [...].

When we work with Creative Time they come with that downside, with the protocols [...] a timetable [...] their schedule. So these relationships involve a series of practical issues, they support and influence the production of this kind of artwork. [...] When producing work with Creative Time I'm also acting with their media voice. [...] So there would be a group of women but, in the middle,

there'd be a group of leaders from the main organisation who would be in touch with the ones from Creative Time.²⁸

According to this statement, she is free to act and agents are brought on board when the organisation involved so requires. Lacy is therefore a mediator in terms of exchanges with the institution, of the visual language, of artistic sensitivity, but also a kind of social mediator, who listens and responds to social demand. At times works can be generated by the "hand" of the artist themselves, but on many other occasions they are created by professionals contracted to that end so that artist and audience come together in the context of the piece as a whole. Or it could even be the public that "makes" the work.

The work that she would carry out online, prior to the onset of cyberfeminism, would already significantly shake these foundations. The first researchers who began to write about the authorship of *net.art* works, a few years after the emergence of these works in the 90s, also shed light on shifting criteria for the same work of art by prestigious institutions. Lourdes Cilleruelo demonstrated how in net art authorship became blurred from the very first of the artistic expressions it produced. Webs which were first used in the 90s as repositories, were redefined as works of art in themselves and acquired by cultural institutions for their collections even under that label. This was the case for the "Adaweb" initiative acquired in 1996 by the Walker Art Centre, which is today however viewed merely as that which it was originally intended to be: a repository. In Spain, as shown by Montserrat Boix, artistic cyberfeminism had little resonance up until then, unlike the activist perspective. With this specifically in mind, one of the first attempts at compilation was made with the *online* publication *Mujeres en Red*, active from the end of the 90s.

As we can see, this research includes the analysis of a number of aspects which influence authorship. Firstly, the method of creating works which is specific to collaborative and community art and which sparked new genre public art; secondly, the creation by or for the Internet which leads to the viral spread of the piece and allows it to be changed from the "originally created" version; or in a similar vein how this affects the participation of agents, variety of artists or of institutions in the artistic project created by a single artist. Change is enshrined in the revolution driven by the knowledge society. Specific to this is the recognition that knowledge does not stand still, and this leads to the questioning of many truths.

Javier Callejo demonstrated how authorship as an individualised phenomenon is systematically shaken up with new systemic and collective ways of producing works²⁹. The use of technologies to amplify and define/redefine knowledge have strengthened this breakaway from the

²⁸ Transcription at <http://toxiclesbian.org/research-project/?lang=en>

²⁹ Javier CALLEJO, *El esquema espacio temporal en la sociedad digital*, Madrid, UNED, 2008.

place of the author in the 19th century. In the modern system, the author becomes blurred to give more importance to what they have created, their content, also demonstrating a continued reworking which hides their "original stamp". This new kind of authorship has come to replace this "reified" author. This context provided the backdrop to the cyberfeminist transformation which goes further still, almost akin to a hallmark of these artists' identity in the restructuring of conventional authorship.

The dematerialisation of art and the cyberfeminist critique

During the 70s, as part of the continued avant-garde breakaway discourse, the birth of conceptual art or, on a social level, the Marxist critique of consumerism and also how this manifested itself in the art world, discussion turned to the dematerialisation of art, as the foundation of the anti-object critique. This raised various questions from different perspectives regarding authorship, the role of the audience or about what an institution should consider to be an archivable piece. Remedios Zafra explained that the Internet went hand-in-hand with art by women, because of its natural attraction:

Just as the female artist / feminist woman link has come up frequently in recent decades, especially within the process of collective awareness, so has interest in feminist artists online - and generally through new forms of media, through which their contributions are disseminated. This is not without cause, because any new space offers added value for women looking for outlets less fettered by patriarchal culture.

In net art there is active interest in the kind of destructive characteristic of a pro-feminist action.³⁰

Implicitly, there is also spontaneous recognition by artists that conventional media, especially in terms of authorship models, clearly respond to the interests of the patriarchy. The feminist struggle's intuition is striving to break free of this framework and even to break it down, to challenge it. But the link to the Internet goes much deeper still. It also applies to the relationship with the machine and, along with this, to opening up the gender debate, to breaking it down as one of transfeminism's essential contributions to the rejuvenation of 21st century feminist language. In her "A Cyborg Manifesto", Donna Haraway poetically paved the way for queer positioning which would allow for a symbolic partnership with the machine³¹. Remedios Zafra substantiates this idea:

³⁰ Remedios ZAFRA, "Femenino.net.art: feminización de la cultura y red Internet", 2001, p. 1. *Mujeres en Red* [on line] <http://www.mujaresenred.net/spip.php?article1534>

³¹ Donna HARAWAY, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century", at *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, Nueva York, Routledge, 1991, pp. 149-181.

Maria Damon talks about "*ciberfems* of the futuristic utopia": a kind of postfeminists who base their actions on the view that the Internet is an optimum space to take advantage of the disembodiment of the subject, and the possibility of achieving this for themselves and in the relevant context using technology. Sadie Plant uses her theories to exemplify this cyberfems link, observing via the link some of the most marked assertions from women as regards technology, as well as the need to take this into consideration in the modern construction of gender, in that their emancipation will be fostered through the growth of cyberspace as a new area of action.³²

As we can see, Zafra uses the magic word here: emancipation. This relates to the persistent will uniting all forms of feminism, to free once and for all each of women's areas of action from the patriarchal ties that bind them. Alex Galloway has definitively linked this concept to authorship, developing the idea put forward by Sadie Plant which was first mentioned by Remedios Zafra:

Plant goes beyond these limits and delves into the complex relationship between woman and machine. This relationship, linked to the issues surrounding identity, is at the very heart of the contemporary movement of cyberfeminism.

To what extent does technology sexually affect us? Can you stamp out Internet discrimination using the sexual anonymity of the medium? Can technology help us to overcome the patriarchy?³³

Cyberfeminist artists would on many occasions use collective names, avatars, almost war cries which would hinder the kind of tautological identification which the history of art will methodically seek; an archiving and list-based approach, which requires clear authorship with irrevocable hallmarks, almost requiring an identity document. This idea, which was swiftly abandoned, that the Internet could signify a path to success in the gender struggle through digital disembodiment and cyborg mediation by the machine, did nevertheless yield the idea of using other parameters to identify authorship. As Galloway tells us, it is an open road to the fight against discrimination. One example of cyborg sensitivity in relation to the process of author recognition itself can be found in the following words spoken by Shu Lea Cheang, where they illustrate how this metaphor has survived the creative process of their *performances*:

I see myself more as a film director when I create an artistic installation or *performance*.

[...] I rely on the fact that the audience -present, absent, connected or disconnected- has a role to play. My body moves like a doll: I'm not a voyeur looking on, but am always part of the *performance*. In these pieces my body is interconnected, dotted and criss-crossed with nodes and

³² ZAFRA, 2001.

³³ Alex GALLOWAY, "Un informe sobre ciberfeminismo. Sadie Plant y VNS Matrix: análisis comparativo", *Estudios online*, 1997, [on line] <http://www.estudiosonline.net/texts/galloway.html>

The feminist struggle is encapsulated in the expression of cyberfeminism in emancipation through the gender-based fight, drawing on "cyborgisation" as a resource and the dematerialisation of the body which the Internet as a tool facilitates, as well as the definitive break with traditional authorship models. Empowering these artists does however require clear definition of their identity as artists and presents a problem for the art world in resolving those pieces which do not fit with the traditional acceptance models used in institutions. Hence the reluctance of museums and art centres to tackle these issues, and the logical problem of how to explain to their audiences that these pieces are also "considered art".

The case of Faith Wilding helps to dovetail the loose ends which have emerged in this study between the practices of modern cyberfeminist artists, public art and those which arose among the pioneering feminist movements in the art world in the 70s. This American artist of Paraguayan origin, a contemporary of Suzanne Lacy in her artistic and educational practices for decades, celebrated in her day for her *performance* pieces, readings and other more classical pieces in terms of the processes she adopted, watered down her authorship to include her views in cyberfeminist collective Subrosa, which she would co-found at the start of the 21st century. She still acts as a critic in the group in connection with the Critical Art Ensemble which allows her to maintain focus on the same concerns she has developed over the years. She would give fresh vision to the most traditional forms of feminism from the 1970s, which would in fact be criticised by some cyberfeminist schools of thought on the pretence of shrugging off their legacy. This artist's influence in the movement remains on guard when it comes to the digital utopianism of activist artists representing new generations. Her dual profile, as researcher María ptqk points out, supporting issues which do not tend to tip the balance in technology's favour, but rather quite the opposite, looking in depth at how these have traditionally jeopardised women, would provide marked intellectual contrast in debates, enriching the different standpoints taken.

Furthermore, the processes chosen to create her works are far from fitting with digital or web media. With Subrosa, works are essentially public art projects, *performances* and indeed some of them are created using the web, but what we can see is the fruit of collective creation rather than something born of her own initiative. This example shows an alternative stance on the same issue but one which is in-keeping with this shared sensitivity shown in artistic creations by various different artists. In Wilding's case this is a transitional journey, from *performance* to *net.art*. From

³⁴ Transcription at <http://toxiclesbian.org/research-project/?lang=en>

single authorship to the dissolution of name and the renouncement of a conventional identity to espouse a collective approach and one which is hard to break down into a single "me". We can also see that, in ways which differ creatively, artists have different approaches both in terms of the patriarchal artwork model, and in terms of the authorship process. The origin of this behaviour is a product of the same feeling: emancipation.

Conclusions

This article has looked at various cases of artists and artistic practices to relate the traditional concept of authorship with the symbolic patriarchy from the perspective of these authors, as well as how this marks a desire for change among feminist artists. The differences between the artistic projects of Suzanne Lacy, Shu Lea Cheang and Faith Wilding are good examples, although we can see convergence in their feminist attitudes.

As we have seen, Lacy considers herself a community organiser and views her use of technology as circumstantial in achieving her objectives. Even her embracing of social networks is aimed at extending the dialogue which feeds into her projects. She sees physical contact as an essential part of this, whilst this is not given importance in the kind of cyberfeminism espoused by Cheang or Wilding. For them, the use of online resources and the formulation of works under the umbrella of *net.art* would be subject to their own experimentation with these new formats, with a view to discovering a new visual alphabet in line with their political intentions. The American artist however, in her book *Mapping the terrain* edited in 1995, would go into great detail about the makeup of new genre public art audiences and emerging "expanded audiences". She makes reference to these and to the use of internet and technologies to update what was supposed to constitute communication in the 3.0 era. However, she explicitly distanced herself from the destructive approach to authorship which was embraced both by Cheang and Wilding. This does not mean that Lacy does not question authorship in itself. She would specifically go on to state how she would apply the term *far west* to the possibilities discovered by feminist artists in the 70s in the new practices they implemented: *body art*, *performance*, community practices... All of these question the authorship legitimisation that still exists for now. This *far west* (California) would be the place where they would discover a new universe from which they could express their artistic message and thus highlight the straightjacketed and discriminatory nature of the art system. In this she mirrors the attitudes of Cheang and Wilding

Furthermore, both Cheang and Lacy would bring other agents into their work who would sometimes substantially change the possible final work. In the case of Cheang these were sponsors such as mobile phone brand Nokia, for whom she worked on the development of pieces to be

displayed on their devices. In Lacy's case this included cultural enterprises such as Creative Time, as we have already seen. The American artist explained that the inclusion of this agent meant a significant change to her own processes, timetable or schedule. It also meant involving an agent with their own voice, who in some parts of the piece would intervene in the first person (for example in online communities) or by generating their own material which they would disseminate about the project. Lacy explained that parts of the conversations with participating social groups would even take place in the company's headquarters and that this would be considered *performance*. Or similarly, some of the expanded audience members participating in the work would go straight to Creative Time and not to the artist. None of this seemed to pose a problem for Lacy or for the Brooklyn Museum, the cultural institution involved in the work *Between the door and the streets* in which Creative Time participated, in terms of the orthodoxy of managing the project.

By exploring who is the spectator of the work and driving change in this respect by involving in its creation and production the concentric circles closest to the piece (their main spectators, of course), Lacy opened up the debate on authorship without considering it an end in itself, but merely making use of the freedom which her moment in history afforded her. Expanded audiences offered a series of co-creators, collaborators, participating publics, spectators... which offer varying intensity to the work and the way it is interpreted. This aspect, which was to be modified by the creative methodologies of these artists, made it impossible to market it as a single work with speculative value and, thanks to this, an entirely new way of remunerating artists emerged. This new complexity was to generate a new economy too, which was much more evenly distributed, surrounding the process and collaborative art generated by these changes in model. Audiences therefore intervened selectively in the creation and production of the work, which would shift its focus to tackle issues relevant to them, which affected them, and which therefore encouraged their involvement: they saw their worlds reflected in art projects. The same audiences lent their image to pieces which would later be exhibited in museums and cultural institutes. Their ways of being, speaking, thinking and feeling would serve as the filter channelled by the artist, thus definitively redefining their role.

In the case of Cheang, although in a different way and via a different route, collaboration would also be an essential part of their processes and generate collaborative online communities. The cyberartist has acted with the total freedom bestowed on them by knowing they fall "outside the system". Cheang said that they used to work with museums because they were an ideal way to reach audiences, but that they also were sponsored by ADSL connections or telephone brands, as we have mentioned. They specifically explained that they maintain online collaborations in their installations to avoid being confined within the four walls of an institution. But Cheang's opposition

to the patriarchy is demonstrated much more vehemently. This is firstly, as they say themselves, because they are from a racial minority, female and queer. The artist illustrates their nomad attitude with a way of entering and exiting the system as they please. They explain that the social or political conditions to which their projects are subjected are sometimes so unbearable that science fiction is a way of projecting their works, of escaping conflict. Their opposition to the patriarchy is mentioned on various occasions:

I consider my work *Bowling Alley* (1995) to be an attack on the patriarchy (<http://bit.ly/2twkNhA>) It is a collaborative online installation developed in three areas: a real bowling alley, an installation in a gallery and a webpage. The action of knocking down pins in the bowling alley interferes with projections in the gallery and causes interference to the webpage. When the general public knocks down a pin, they provoke "upheaval" within an institution and "hack" the network subconsciously. The collaborative online environment lets the public intervene. It is a poetic gesture which allows the public to bring down the patriarchal system.³⁵

Remedios Zafra would explain these aspects in a different way during her intervention at Matadero in 2016, having viewed Cheang's work *Brandon*:

[*Brandon* is presented] as one of the first net.art works held by a museum at the end of the nineties, and we shouldn't forget that this was a time when net.art was at dialectic odds in terms of the Art-Institution role in the Internet age, from speculation about the democratisation many people felt was offered by the Internet so that art would at last be merged with "everyday life"; suggesting that the Internet would break down the divides between museum and world and that the screen would wave a magic wand and finally bring about the "democratisation of art".³⁶

Zafra is very clear about the market's position on any breakaway initiative to the point where she almost disengages with them. This, nevertheless, has not changed the path these creations would take, always finding spaces and markets where they could resonate, within and outside of museums and art galleries. Cheang had this to say about how *Brandon* was created:

When I first came up with this project, I had already decided that it would be a project involving lots of people and lots of institutions. My aim was to involve the Guggenheim Museum, and once I managed that and they decided that it was the net.art work they would take on, I tried to get other institutions on board in the same way, to help get the project off the ground.

As regards the aesthetics, the way I planned this project to be was to have various interfaces and over a year lots of artists came together to help design the piece. And I think there was a kind of understanding between the artists and me, about how the aesthetic design should be, that there had to be a certain coherence across all the interfaces. [...]

³⁵ Transcription at <http://toxiclesbian.org/research-project/?lang=en>

³⁶ Transcription at <http://toxiclesbian.org/research-project/?lang=en>

Once I tried to launch an open call to artists in a hospital or a prison, who might want to participate in my panopticon by adding more cells. This would have allowed me to keep the door open to expanding those interfaces. And, as a conceptual artist who had designed this artwork, I invited people who I knew might bring something interesting to this project to participate.³⁷

We should keep in mind here that, in the way that Cheang tells the story at the start of this article, this work was acquired for a dollar for the Guggenheim's new collection, and was not subject to stringent controls by the museum during its production process, which lasted for a year. The Guggenheim used it as a jumping-off point to acquire a series of similar works, in which it later lost interest.

In summary and to conclude, we can see on this path of resistance, refusal to submit and experimentation by those involved, how traditional authorship models are enriched with new possible configurations which would multiply to infinity the diversity of creative possibilities, also in terms of who exercises them. This characteristic (diversity) is something which is, without doubt, intrinsically specific to the world of art and conversely the exercise of control and standardising orthodoxy will be very different: in terms of the market, economy and price of things. We can clearly see within art discourse that there seem to be no limits to the kinds of avenues which might open themselves to us. These appear when they serve as the legitimising arbitrators of the other established powers, which meet strictly speculative needs, erect barriers and limitations to things which emerged themselves in way which differs completely to and is removed from these intentions. This disquiet begs the question: how long will this censorship last on feminist discourse relating to the need to change the parameters of the state of play? Can these double standards survive in 21st century institutions?

³⁷ "Transcription of content in the first open public presentation of the net.art work, February 2016", p.14, accessible via "Case study of Shu Lea Cheang and projects developed in Spain" in the project *Gender identity and public art. From the Feminist Upheaval to Public Art and the Cyberspace: The Far West of Opportunities* [online] <http://bit.ly/2tdZKQz> [Consulted: 14 de julio de 2017].

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