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Peirce and Latin American “razonabilidad”: forerunners of Transmodernity

After Modernism and Postmodernism, Transmodernism has been advocated as a more faithful coining for our plastic and transient age. Introduced by the Spanish philosopher Rosa María Rodríguez Magda, the term “Transmodernity” –both diachronic and methodological- hopes to reintegrate many awkward postmodern differentials, to balance some supposed breaks with more in-depth sutures, to counter relativism with a topological logic where some “universal relatives” provide invariants beyond the flux of transformations. In many ways, Peirce’s architectonic system of philosophy included already most of the salient features of Transmodernity, a situation which perhaps explains the unusual relevance of Peirce’s thought in the beginning of a new millennium. In fact, Peirce’s system is essentially *topological*, open to all sorts of continuous transformations (pragmatic maxim, triadic semiotic, classifications of sciences, synechism, etc), and the system is particularly able to represent a bimodal net (Petitot) of *both* differentials and invariants, providing a full understanding of the *TRANS* prefix. On the other hand, a steady tradition of Latin American thought at the beginning of XX<sup>th</sup> century has advocated the importance of some sort of “razonabilidad” (term introduced by the Uruguayan philosopher Carlos Vaz Ferreira, merging “razón”/reason and “sensibilidad”/sensitivity) which must explore the borders (*TRANS*) of thought. A subcontinent fully traversed by change, Latin America has been able to construct various sophisticated synthetic fabrics, weaving autonomous and foreign threads, where the social and cultural transits of the region have acquired some of the highest artistic expressions of the XX<sup>th</sup> century. Beyond Postmodernist skepticism towards reason and universality, both Peirce’s system and Latin American *TRANS* culture help to reinterpret universals as partial invariants of a logic of change, where the *borders of reason and sensibility* appear as objects of reason in their own right. The important crisis revealed by Postmodernism (impossibility of unique perspectives, impossibility of cutting out antinomies, impossibility of stable hierarchies, etc.) can nevertheless be well understood using a *continuous geometrical logic of reason and sensibility*, open both to changes and invariances. This short article is intended as a programmatic one, pointing out the possible relevance that some *non-standard pragmatic thinking* (Peirce’s “pragmaticism”, Latin America’s “razonabilidad”) may have for our Transmodern epoch. The article is divided in four sections: (i) Transmodernity; (ii) Peirce’s system; (iii) Latin America’s *TRANS* essayists; (iv) A sought gluing for our epoch.

*I. Transmodernity*

In the received views, Modernism stresses variants of self-consciousness, self-evolving vitalism, hope for unity along the borders of reason, while Postmodernism, with its proclaimed break (“post”), emphasizes singularities, differentials, richness of artificial life and supposed deaths of reason and universality. In fact, one can already discover the full seeds of both movements in some gigantic Romantic thinkers. In Novalis’ *Allgemeines*

*Brouillon*<sup>1</sup>, the stage is carefully set to an investigation of fluxions of consciousness, *both in their differential and integral* trends, with all sorts of remarks elucidating the tensions between ("modern") relative fabrics with invariants and ("postmodern") residues and singularities. Novalis, as many other Romantic geniuses, was indeed an early explorer of the *TRANS* phenomena: all his work, both philosophical and poetical, focuses on *motion* and studies knowledge as transformation. In the same vein, some truly exceptional Modern universalists, like Valéry<sup>2</sup> or Florenskij<sup>3</sup>, have been attentive to *both* swings of the pendulum, towards the differential and the integral. Of course, the same can be said of the great founders of Postmodernism, particularly of the "amplitwist" mind of Deleuze<sup>4</sup>, but the excesses of lesser postmodernists towards the differential are certainly far away from the broad views of their Masters.

"Transmodernity", introduced as a serious tendency which would help to balance some dogmatic Postmodernist claims, was proposed by Rosa María Rodríguez Magda some twenty years ago<sup>5</sup>. Transmodernism maintains the open dissemination spirit of Postmodernism, as well as some of its main emphasis (not conquests: already in Novalis, Valéry, Florenskij, etc.) around Truth fragmentations and Antinomy conjunctions, but goes well beyond the mere register of singular breakdowns and tries to propose new relative nets to encompass residuation. A rich *counterpoint* emerges between Postmodernism and Transmodernism: break, locality, differentiation, contradiction, ambiguity, impossibility of universals, "all is worth", Death – sort of Postmodern dissonances – are to be contrasted with revision, local/global dialectics, oscillation differentiation/integration, partial gluing of relative coherences, fabric vagueness/exactness, relative universals, "some is worth", Renaissances – sort of Transmodern harmonics –. *Both* the dissonances and the harmonics are fundamental for our epoch, but one should not forget the *necessary* swingings of the pendulum.

Many forms of European thought have been well aware of the Postmodern/Transmodern counterpoint, without any need of cataloguing or labelling the tension. Warburg's works<sup>6</sup> (1889-1929) on the Renaissance of Pagan Antiquity show how art criticism is a form of seismography which uncovers whole trends of thought by the exploration of small aesthetic residuals. Benjamin's *Passages*<sup>7</sup> (1927-40) studies an extraordinarily rich example of local, differential, singular forces, weaved/glued in a net of oscillating significances, a fabric of relative universals, which, far from dissolving, give to Paris its complex, multifarious identity. In his last writings (1958-61)<sup>8</sup>, Merleau-Ponty

<sup>1</sup> Novalis, *Opera filosofica* (2 vols.), Torino, Einaudi, 1993.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Valéry, *Cahiers*, Paris, Éditions du CNRS (facsimile edition, 29 vols.), 1957-1961. Paul Valéry, *Cahiers 1894-1914*, Paris, Gallimard (critical edition, 10 vols.), 1987-2006. Paul Valéry, *Cahiers*, Paris, Gallimard / Pléiade (anthology, 2 vols.), 1973-1974.

<sup>3</sup> Italian bibliography has been particularly attentive to the reception of Florenskij's works: from early compilations (*La colonna e il fondamento della verità* (ed. E. Zolla), Milano, Rusconi, 1974; *Le porte regali. Saggio sull'icona* (ed. E. Zolla), Milano, Adelphi, 1977; *La prospettiva rovesciata e altri scritti* (ed. N. Misler), Roma, Casa del Libro, 1983), to many other editions multiplied in the past decade (in charge of L. Zak and N. Valentini).

<sup>4</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Différence et répétition*, Paris, PUF, 1968. Integral system in Philippe Mengue, *Gilles Deleuze ou le système du multiple*, Paris, Kimé, 1994.

<sup>5</sup> Rosa María Rodríguez Magda, *La sonrisa de Saturno. Hacia una teoría transmoderna*, Barcelona, Anthropos, 1989. Full circle in Rosa María Rodríguez Magda, *Transmodernidad*, Barcelona, Anthropos, 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Aby Warburg, *Opere* (2 vols.), Torino, Nino Aragno, 2003-2008.

<sup>7</sup> Walter Benjamin, *I "passages" di Parigi (Opere complete IX)*, Torino, Einaudi, 2000.

<sup>8</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Notes des cours du Collège de France* (1958-59, 1960-61), Paris, Gallimard, 1996; *L'oeil et l'esprit* (last text published in life, 1961, magnificent door to entry Merleau-Ponty's work), Paris, Gallimard, 1964; and its two great posthumous works, *La prose du monde*, Paris, Gallimard, 1969; *Le visible et l'invisible*, Paris, Gallimard, 1964.

approaches a body which operates on the field of knowledge as a *sheaf* of functions relating vision and motion, interior and exterior, reality and imagination, attentive to the borders and antinomies where creation evolves. In these, and many other endeavors, all dualities disappear, a continuum is looked for, and the cultural web is understood as a complex topological space where all sorts of breaks/sutures of continuity give rise to the most interesting artistic, philosophical and scientific expressions of the epoch. As we will see in the following section, it is our contention that Peirce's *pragmaticist* system can be seen as *THE* perfect context for understanding this state of affairs.

## II. Peirce's modal, multipolar and topological system

The pragmaticist maxim – as Peirce came to call it, to distinguish it from other interpretations (behaviorist, utilitarian and psychological) – was reformulated many times in his intellectual development. The most famous statement is that of 1878, but those from 1903 and 1905 are more precise: "Consider what effects which might conceivably have practical bearings we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object" (1878, CP 5.402) – "Pragmatism is the principle that every theoretical judgement expressible in a sentence in the indicative mood is a confused form of thought whose only meaning, if it has any, lies in its tendency to enforce a corresponding practical maxim expressible as a conditional sentence having its apodosis in the imperative mood" (1903, CP 5.18) – "The entire intellectual purport of any symbol consists in the total of all general modes of rational conduct which, conditionally upon all the possible different circumstances, would ensue upon the acceptance of the symbol" (1905, CP 5.438). The 1905 statement stresses that the knowledge of symbols is obtained by following certain "general modes" across a spectrum of "possible different circumstances." This modalization of the maxim (remarked in the odd repetition of "conceivability" in the 1878 statement) introduces into the Peircean system the problems of *links* between the *possible* contexts of interpretation that we can have for a given symbol. In turn, in the 1903 statement we see, on the one hand, that the practical maxim should be expressible as a conditional whose *necessary* consequent must be contrasted, and, on the other hand, that any indicative theoretical judgment, within the *actual*, only can be specified by a series of diverse practices associated with the judgment.

Broadening these precepts to the general context of semiotics, for knowing a given arbitrary sign (the context of the *actual*) we must run through the multiple contexts of interpretation that can interpret the sign (the context of the *possible*), and within each context, we must study the practical (imperative) consequents associated with each of those interpretations (the context of the *necessary*). In this process the *relations* between the possible contexts (situated in a *global* space) and the relations between the fragments of necessary contrastation (placed in a *local* space) take a fundamental relevance; this underscores the conceptual importance of the logic of relations, which was systematized by Peirce himself. Thus the pragmaticist maxim shows that knowledge, seen as a logico-semiotic process, is preeminently contextual (as opposed to absolute), relational (as opposed to substantial), modal (as opposed to determinate), and synthetic (as opposed to analytic). The maxim filters the world through three complex webs that enable us to differentiate the one in the many, and, inversely, to integrate the many in the one: the *modal* web already mentioned, a *representational* web and a *relational* web. Certainly, in addition to opening themselves to the world of the possible, the signs of the world must above all be capable of representation within the languages (linguistic or diagrammatical) that are used

by communities of interpreters. The problems of representation (fidelity, distance, reflexivity, partiality, etc.) are therefore intimately linked with the *differentiation of the one in the multiple*: the reading of a single fact, or of a single concept, which is dispersed through multiple languages, through multiple "general modes" of grasping the data, and through multiple rules of organization, and of stratification, of the information.

One of the virtues of Peircean pragmati(ci)sm, and, in particular of the fully modalized pragmaticist maxim, consists, however, in making possible it to *reintegrate anew the multiple in the one*, thanks to the third-relational-web. Indeed, after decomposing a sign into subfragments within the several possible contexts of interpretation, the correlations between the fragments give rise to new forms of knowledge, which were hidden in the first perception of the sign. The pragmatic dimension stresses the *connection* of some possible correlations, discovering analogies and transferences between structural strata that were not discovered until the process of differentiation had been performed. Thus, although the maxim detects the fundamental importance of local interpretations, it also encourages the reconstruction of the global approaches by way of adequate *gluing* of the local. The pragmaticist maxim should accordingly be seen as a kind of abstract *differential and integral calculus*, which can be applied to the general theory of representations, i.e. to logic and semiotics as understood, in a more generic way, by Peirce.

Underlying the good use of the pragmaticist maxim, applicable in theory to the broadest range of problems of knowledge, is a *hypothesis of continuity* between the world of phenomena and the spectrum of representations of those phenomena. That means that the relational links between the signs, and, in particular, the semiotic cascades between the Peircean interpreters, can be placed in a *non-artificial generic ground*. Peirce's *synechism* postulates a real operation of the continuum in nature and allows us to trust in a certain continuity that helps to bring together, in a natural way, phenomenology and logic. On the other hand, from a merely intuitive point of view, the spectrum of modalities that emerges in the pragmaticist maxim immediately involves the postulation of a generic and abstract continuum that makes it possible to link the different modal gradations and correlations (a general intuition that Peirce will try to reproduce concretely with his "tinctures" in the existential graphs). A full modal and relational understanding of the pragmaticist maxim thus brings us to the Peircean continuum.

Peirce's modal, multipolar and topological system<sup>9</sup> investigates then the study of transferences of information around regions and borders on such a continuum. The TRANS motto is a crucial one for Peirce. His many classifications of the sciences<sup>10</sup> show how one can "tincture" the regions of knowledge using his cenopythagorical categories (1-3), and Peirce's most creative ideas (for example, the logic of abduction, iterated continuous semiosis, existential graphs, etc.) lie precisely on the *borders* of regions where information is being transferred (for example, hypothesis (1) considered as a retro-demonstrative web (3), asymptotic behavior (3) of signs' action-reactions (2), iteration and deiteration (2) of the line of continuity (3) on the Phemic Sheet (1), etc.) Many fundamental Peircean techniques, such as *modalizing, correlating, connecting, gluing, differentiating and integrating*, are in fact geometrical techniques applied to a very broad range of problems,

<sup>9</sup> For many precisions and developments of these ideas, see, for example, Jérôme Havenel, *Logique et mathématique du Continu chez Charles Sanders Peirce* (Doctoral Thesis), Paris, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 2006, or Fernando Zalamea, *El continuo peirceano*, Bogotá, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2001.

<sup>10</sup> See the recent Marco Annoni, *Peirce, Pragmatism and the Words of Science* (Doctoral Thesis), Pisa, Università di Pisa, 2009, pp. 110-146, and the classic Beverly Kent, *Charles S. Peirce: Logic and the Classification of Sciences*, Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1987.

and are mainly motivated by a crucial *critical* study of *relativity, plasticity and contamination*. It may then be fair to say that Peirce's introduces a sort of "Einsteinian turn"<sup>11</sup> in general knowledge (of course, before the very Einstein), opening the way to the study of relative movements and invariances (categories, universal relatives, synechism, etc.), focusing attention on TRANS problems and techniques, and producing in this way a profound revision of Kant's more publicized "Copernican turn" in philosophy.

### III. Latin America's trans essayists

Independently of Peirce's system and influence (even if, through Dewey, some simplified features of Peirce's ideas traveled the Continent), Latin America has had a rich tradition of first-class essayists involved with the TRANS problematic. Carlos Vaz Ferreira (Uruguay, 1872-1958), Pedro Henríquez Ureña (Dominican Republic, 1884-1946), Alfonso Reyes (Mexico, 1889-1959), Fernando Ortiz (Cuba, 1881-1969), Ezequiel Martínez Estrada (Argentina, 1895-1964), Mariano Picón Salas (Venezuela, 1901-1965), Ángel Rama (Uruguay, 1926-1983), Néstor García Canclini (Argentina, b. 1939), Jesús Martín Barbero (Spain/Colombia, b. 1937), among others<sup>12</sup>, have been extremely attentive to many salient features of the *plastic* conformation of Latin American culture, with all sort of temporal phenomena (pre-modern, romantic, modern, postmodern, transmodern) *coexisting* together, and with all sorts of *hybrids* emerging between multipolar tensions. In fact, the logics of domination in Latin America have always been very complex, beyond bipolar left and right radicalizations. Many *reciprocal* seduction processes have occurred between the dominants and the dominated, with convenient social blends for both extremes, not just reducible to oppression instances. Beyond strong vertical forces, ubiquitous *diagonal passages* have molded the Continent. From the "ordered city" of the idealized colonial maps to the "revolutionary city" at the beginning of XX<sup>th</sup> century<sup>13</sup>, Latin American thought has been indeed systematically diagonal, mediating, hybrid, bringing together "internal traditions and syncretic constructions oriented to universal forms"<sup>14</sup>. The *contaminating thickness* of such mixtures is one of the characteristic features of Latin America.

Carlos Vaz Ferreira's "razonabilidad"<sup>15</sup> (1910) and Fernando Ortiz's "transculturación"<sup>16</sup> (1940) synthesize some of the main dynamical forces which weave the plastic fabrics of Latin America. "Razonabilidad" (a Spanish neologism blending "razón" and "sensibilidad") situates knowledge along Pascal's pendulum between "raison" and "coeur", not as a dramatic antithesis but rather as some sort of *natural continuity*. In turn, "transculturación" (another Spanish neologism) opens the way to *transit gluings* which escape dualisms between foreign culture ("aculturación") or forced culture ("inculturación"), and explores the multifarious melting pot of Latin American's popular/universal forms of expression, with its main subsequent achievements in literature (Borges, Rulfo, García Márquez, Onetti, etc.) or in the arts (Tamayo, Torres García,

<sup>11</sup> Fernando Zalamea, *Ariel y Arisbe*, Bogotá, Convenio Andrés Bello, 2000, pp. 150ss.

<sup>12</sup> For some panoramic perspectives, see: Fernando Zalamea, *Ariel y Arisbe. Evolución y evaluación del concepto de América Latina en el siglo XX*, Bogotá, Convenio Andrés Bello, 2000; *América – una trama integral. Transversalidad, bordes y abismos en la cultura americana, siglos XIX y XX*, Bogotá, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2009; and *Pasajes demediados. Memoria, utopía y frontera en el ensayo, la narrativa y el arte latino-americanos 1930-1970* (México, Siglo XXI, forthcoming).

<sup>13</sup> Ángel Rama, *La ciudad letrada*, Montevideo, FIAR, 1984.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 121.

<sup>15</sup> Carlos Vaz Ferreira, *Lógica viva – Moral para intelectuales*, Caracas, Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1979.

<sup>16</sup> Fernando Ortiz, *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar*, Caracas, Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1978.

Reverón, Obregón, etc.) A peculiar *back or wrong side logic* (formally reminiscent of Peirce's arguments in Gamma's existential graphs, on the back of the Phemic Sheet) emerges then from a generic perspective: Latin America tries to construct a triad Memory-Utopia-Frontier, (i) starting from residues and shadow, (ii) pointing to Utopian transfigurations, and (iii) describing, in the borders between dead Memory and projected Utopia, the remaining *Elements of Disaster*.

The critical study of relativity, plasticity and contamination, that we pointed out as basic in Peirce's system, is also very much a central investigation for Latin American TRANS essayists. In his *Seis ensayos en busca de nuestra expresión*<sup>17</sup> (1928), Henríquez Ureña points to the tension between tradition and rebellion repeated in each Latin American generation, with a double dialectics of oblivion and invention, which, on an awkwardly thin Present, forgets the Past and projects the Future. An *iterated* strategy of lifting entire constructions from residues explains both the region's fragility and ductility. The movement, the "liquidity", the topological contamination of Latin America follows. In *El deslinde*<sup>18</sup> (1946), Reyes studies the frontier ("deslinde" = border) between "literary" and "non-literary" forms through an oscillating relative methodology: grammar, poetics, semantics, history, sociology, statistics, logic, mathematics, even theology. The result invokes a "principle of frontiers, contaminations, broadenings, fertilizations, metaphorical inspirations"<sup>19</sup>. Latin America follows as an *n*<sup>th</sup> order mixture: historical border of Western Civilization, cultural blend, sociological contamination, dialectical "razonabilidad". In *Radiografía de la Pampa*<sup>20</sup> (1933), Martínez Estrada breaks the very borders of reasoning, alternating grammatical forms (third singular / first plural), oscillating between poetical flashes and sociological disquisitions, looking for permanence behind variation (recall what we termed Peirce's integral and differential calculus), showing the inevitable place of chance behind structure (recall Peirce's dialectics between tychism and synechism). The Pampa as a reflection of Latin America (sort of a Phemic Sheet reflecting Peirce's architecture) codifies the complex transit between demolition and construction, residue and fabrics, comings and goings out of Modernity, figure and place, Man and Nature. As would happen some years later with Merleau-Ponty, the cuts between opposite notions are erased, a continuous sheaf emerges to control the transit, plasticity is acknowledged at every level.

As XX<sup>th</sup> century evolved, one can sketch summarily three main *optics* to understand Latin American thought. First, a sort of *panoptics* (essayists, 1920-1950: Henríquez Ureña, Reyes, Ortiz, Picón Salas, for example), which looked for globalizing unity in the transit between Europe and America and emphasized the strongly synthetic character of Latin American creativity. Second, a sort of *microscopics* (writers 1950-1970: Borges, Lezama Lima, Rulfo, Guimaraes, Onetti, García Márquez, for example), which elevated the microlocalization of their Universes (Buenos Aires, Habana, Comala, Sertao, Santa María, Macondo) to full reflections of humanity. Third, a sort of *telescopics* (critics 1970-2000: Rama, Gutiérrez Girardot, García Canclini, Martín Barbero, for example), which systematically connected the local and the global, and dissected the many contaminations

<sup>17</sup> Pedro Henríquez Ureña, "Seis ensayos en busca de nuestra expresión", in: *Obra crítica*, México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1960.

<sup>18</sup> Alfonso Reyes, *El deslinde*, México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1963 (Obras Completas de Alfonso Reyes, tomo XV).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 418.

<sup>20</sup> Ezequiel Martínez Estrada, *Radiografía de la pampa*, Buenos Aires, ALLCA XX (Colección Archivos), 1996.

between "popular" and "higher" culture, "region" and "universe", "proper" and "foreign"<sup>21</sup>. The result, as before, *erases false bipolar considerations* and opens the way to a fair understanding of Latin America as some sort of multiplicatively incarnated – relative, plastic, contaminated – Peircean Third<sup>22</sup>. One has to say that, if Peirce's system provides extremely subtle *theoretical* tools for understanding the TRANS problematic, Latin American essayists, artists, writers and critics do complement the situation with some of its most plastic and profoundly beautiful *practical* incarnations available.

#### IV. A sought gluing for our epoch

The bottom of many crucial questions in our epoch lies in the study of reintegration, or critical gluing, of Postmodern differentials. Transmodernity emphasizes that such a connectedness lies in the very heart of Modernism, along a steady tradition of "pendulum" thinkers, attentive both to the local residue and the global structure. Novalis, Warburg, Cassirer, Benjamin, Auerbach, Blumemberg are examples of what would seem a German special capacity to deal with these dialectical problems. But also, as we have seen, Peirce enters the picture in a most central way, and Latin American XX<sup>th</sup> century thought may help to elucidate the panorama. To glue correctly our (contently) dispersed culture, a good initial step could be then to reintegrate these, and others, fragments of the diagram. But *precisely* what Peirce's pragmaticist maxim advocates is to study the scattered parts of a situation, *in order* to connect them as a fair understanding of the situation. Pragmaticism, thus, does not seem to be just a *casual* cultural machinery to be used by some adepts, but rather a *natural* tool to address the most urgent questions of our times.

A *programmatic construction of a sheaf of partial cultural gluings* could then be articulated around three main pieces of information: (I) Methodological forces: topological and transformational thinking, universal relatives, logic of sheaves, residuation theory, pendulum weaving, etc. (II) Cultural realizations: critical theory, metaphoric sedimentation, contaminating strata, mediating hierarchies, etc. (III) Projective goals: description of reflective residues (gluing local and global), dense fabrics (joining multipolar threads), plastic generic forms (allowing continuity and dislocating dualisms), etc. It is our contention that (i) Peirce's system and many mathematical tools, both modern (Riemann, Galois) and contemporary (Grothendieck), provide all the necessary theoretical background to support (I); (ii) Germany's critical dialectical tradition and Latin America's TRANS essayists give good examples of how to deal with (II); and (iii) the very "end" of Postmodernism as such, with its reformulations within Modernism and Transmodernity, show the imperative of the *integrated relativity, plasticity and contamination* sought in (III). Precise labours on these problems will take years, but, with many *non-standard* tools at hand, pragmaticism and "razonabilidad" can lead the way.

<sup>21</sup> Long development of this "triadic optics" in: Fernando Zalamea, *América – una trama integral. Transversalidad, bordes y abismos en la cultura americana, siglos XIX y XX*, Bogotá, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2009, pp. 183-291.

<sup>22</sup> Long defense of Latin America "identity" along Thirdness in: Fernando Zalamea, *Ariel y Arisbe*, Bogotá, Convenio Andrés Bello, 2000, pp. 91-147.

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