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14200 Woodmount  
Detroit, Mich.

# WEEKLY BULLETIN



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No. 25

## SYMPOSIUM ON MODERNISM

By HERBERT G. WENZELL

*This is the third and last of a series of treatises delivered in a symposium on Modernism vs. Traditionalism at a joint meeting of the Detroit Chapter, A. I. A. and the Michigan Society of Architects held on May 25. In previous issues we have published Mr. Arthur K. Hyde's paper, which was a general discussion of the subject, and that of Mr. Wirt C. Rowland who sponsored the modernist cause. Herein Mr. Wenzell defends the traditionalist.*

A symposium on the subject of modern architecture is nothing new. Some of us listened to an excellent combination of speakers in a symposium at the 1930 Convention of the Institute at Washington, and I don't think much can be added to what was said there. Impartial then as I am now, I am inclined to think that Mr. Howe, the most modern of the modernists, had somewhat the better of the argument, and this was natural. The man of great faith considers all those without the fold as black sheep, and their sins and errors are manifest everywhere because there are so many of them, whereas the new Utopia has infinite possibilities and none can gainsay.

### Architects' Luncheon

32nd Floor, Union Guardian Building

Private Dining Room,

South West Corner

Tuesday, June 21, 2:30 p. m.

Since 1930, strange, bewildering and terrible things have happened, every brand of racketeering conceivable has been uncovered. We are depressed physically, mentally and financially, and the most depressing thing about it all is that this new movement in architecture has invaded Chicago with the biggest five-ring circus of glittering examples of modernism ever assembled.

Let us recall the Fair of 1893—the beauteous columns—the Greek and Roman Empire of McKim, Meade & White—40 years. Sic semper tyrannus.

My battle is with the edificers of this World's Fair, with the theorist of this new architecture, with the machine. I am a humanist-modernist. I

am lined up with the prophets who are now within a few hours' travel from here, Frank Lloyd Wright and Saarinen. We have the best theory and the finest examples within our reach. But the prophet is without honor in his own land.

In order to get near the foundation for this new architecture I went to the sources of critical information, LeCorbusier, Haskell and Hitchcock, the publicists and loud-speakers. Here I found a great deal of fine writing involving metaphysics and aesthetics, and it dawned upon me that there were many points of similarity between this theory of architecture and that of modern painting. Since in the past I have tried my best to come to some conclusion as to the why-for of this modern painting and had approached the subject without prejudice, and because I believe it is a parallel case in critical analysis, I would like to make a few comments which might be enlightening.

First, by far the greater number of those who are qualified to judge of art in general, and incidentally obtain a livelihood therefrom, are convinced that modern painting has reached a definite stage of development, and that the school of "Expressionism" will be accepted by the layman as surely as death and taxes. It is to be noted that before this school had been accepted modern painting had gone through at least eight phases, all of which from Futurism to Vorticism have been acknowledged to be fads. Expressionism, the accepted style, is distinguished by what is termed "significant form" and "mobile color," with insistence upon a vague dimension, which might be the fourth. I have, of course, been concerned about the definition of these terms, and in Cheney's "Primer of Modern Art" which is the simplest exposition I have been able to find, I come upon this definition of "significant form:" "It is form in which the record of vision is felt to be compatible

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## HOUSE IN A PARK

The architects' luncheon last Tuesday in the south west Vista of the Aztec Tower brought out many interesting comments on the demonstration house in Grand Circus Park. The house now being remodeled before the public eye is a part of the modernizing campaign instituted by the Detroit Building Congress. Mr. Carl A. Strand is general chairman of the campaign.

Mr. W. G. Malcomson as president of the Congress has designated the architectural unit as the agency in charge of the demonstration.

Most of the personnel in Charge of the project took time off from their labors Tuesday noon to compare notes around the luncheon table. Those present were messrs. W. G. Malcomson, C. W. Ditchy, Louis Kamper, T. C. Hughes, Edw. C. Fidler, N. C. Sorensen, A. W. Balle, G. Frank Cordner, Arthur K. Hyde, George Howenstein, Tracy Augur, Alvin E. Harley, Willis Hall, Frank H. Wright, Richard Mildner, H. G. Kiefer, Adolph Eisen and David H. Williams.

Construction is proceeding with dispatch and to an ever changing gallery of Woodward avenue pedestrians. The number of architects taking part would put to shame the Allied Architects' Association of Los Angeles in doing their city hall.

Interest on the part of the public rivals that of Radio City and already letters to the newspapers are protesting the marring our beautiful park with such a blotch.—But the important thing is that the public are responding and with proper direction they will be convinced of the merit of the project, that of encouraging modernization jobs and thereby creating employment.

Mr. A. S. Douglass of the Detroit Edison Company, who have contributed so generously to the movement, reports that he was stimulated by the activity to build an addition to his own house.—Since then three of his neighbors have done similar work. This seems to afford a splendid example of what happens in a community once the idea gets started.

Within a few hours after the first section of the old house was placed in the park an inquiry for a sizeable alteration was received and is now being worked out. M. Arthur Kraska, carpenter contractor on the job, has received several inquiries some of which have resulted in contracts, while other are pending.

Gus Balle, all-around man and pinch hitter, on the morning after the old shack loomed up was encountered by a policeman who wanted to know what it was about and when it was put there. Gus said he reckoned it was put there some time last night. There was a large sign on the house announcing it was the work of the Detroit Building Congress. The policeman looked at the sign and said, "My gawd, did congress put this here last night?"

Gus announced that he expected a load of bricks to arrive and suggested that he would like to have them stacked on the sidewalk. The policeman strenuously objected, stating that they would have to be placed inside the ropes. "You don't suppose I'm going to allow those communists to get to a pile of bricks behind my back, do you?" he queried.

Speculation on the part of passers-by indicate, that not enough attention has been given to information. One spectator asked Louis Kamper if it was an entrance to the underworld. Louis, who is in charge of sheet metal work, tried to get Wally Candler to put a stork's nest on the chimney but Wally says he is out of that business now.

"What is to be done with the house afterwards?" one of the gallery asked Dick Mildner? "I don't know, what would you suggest?"

"Well leave it until the Fourth of July and the communists will put a bomb under it."

Tracy Augur was chatting with a friend on Woodward avenue when along come Chester Sorensen in overalls and carrying a trowel. "Just look at that," said the friend. "Isn't it a shame? There is one of our leading architects working as a stone mason." Tracy says that when a lady asked him about costs of certain parts of the work he couldn't answer, but that if he had been an architect he would have taken a retainer fee.

Dave Williams, chairman of the design committee thinks the place may need a lot of ivy, since they have put an English verge board on a colonial house, but Clair Ditchy assures him that the defect can be remedied with his pocket knife.

Information from now on will be well taken care of as Frank Cordner has been named as a committee of one to do the bally hooing. He proposes a series of signs which Clair Ditchy has agreed to execute. A "Circular of Information" will also be prepared and an information booth established.

The formal opening, Frank thinks, should be marked by the presence of Mayor Murphy, the Common Council and some of the best talent from the local theatres. W. G. may be able to get the Elks band headed by a couple of Elks in good standing, the Edison Company to furnish the pails, and the band to head a parade of architects in smocks with T squares marching from the house to the Aztec Tower.

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## Symposium On Modernism

(Continued from Page 1)

with the free and characteristic movement of the human hand, in or with the particular medium employed." "Even so," the author adds, "This definition is but a shallow evasion of the deeper problems involved in the theory of form, but serves to indicate how far material has recently been studied for its special sort of expressiveness." With this elementary definition in mind we should be prepared to enjoy the examples of modern painting in the permanent collection of the Detroit Institute.

In order to appreciate modern painting it is important to keep in mind that no art has significance except the primitive, the creative—Negroid Art, Etruscan, some Egyptian, early Hellenic, early Christian and Romanesque. Of individual painters with whom we are familiar—El Greco, Constable, some of Rubens, and strangely Rembrandt comes in with one painting, "Old Woman Paring her Nails"—but more especially El Greco, the first distortionist—we believed it to be due to defective vision—but this has been proven otherwise. Leonardo da Vinci, Phidias, Velasquez, Raphael, Hals and the rest are copyists, naturalistic, sterile. We are to shed all culture, education, training, and begin again at the beginning—as with the new architecture.

You will have noted that distortion and crudity are the most obvious of the characteristics of "Expressionism." It is to be wondered what consideration of the abstract would lead to the deformation of nature to such an extent as to be repulsive. There is no other explanation than that it is due to the demands of spatial organization, which is related to significant form. In the new architecture what appears to us as crude and distorted is but the expression of function which is the significant thing.

I am told that the appeal of the modern painting is to the senses, the emotions, that it has little to do with the intellect. If this is so, I must ask to what senses and to what emotions. I must ask the same regarding the new architecture. I am not inspired by the machine. It leaves me cold and affects me as the morgue.

This new architecture like modern painting requires the dumping of all our concepts of what is beautiful, exuberant, dramatic and interesting. We find the phrase of propaganda, "Form follows function," and it might be "significant form" with as vague a definition. Here as in painting is the intense desire for simplification, the insistence upon anatomy, upon structural organization. Assuming that this is expressed nothing else is required, ornamentation, relief, texture, design for interest. Theoretically these are taboo.

According to this school, the characteristic of our time is the machine—it is practical, utilitarian, entirely detached from a useless past. Nothing unnecessary to its well-defined function exists. Because of this it is free from all sham artifice, and so it should be beautiful. This is the model to follow—and the method. The architect should be able to construct the contrivance for living in the same way, and with precise formula each requirement of the "machine to live in" shall be solved. But I cannot agree that this is possible in practice. At any rate it leads to the use of arbitrary forms and formulae, and whether he wishes to or not the modernist is bound to design with forms corresponding to his idea of "modern form," and again he becomes a traditionalist. Mr. Howe, in his paper, states that "Modernism" is not a style—it is a state of mind. I think I can prove by his own work that he is partially in error as to this leading statement.

In the April, 1931 issue of the *Architectural Record*, I find renderings of two commercial buildings of the same general type, the one the building

for the McGraw Hill Publishing Co. by Hood, the other an office building in Philadelphia by Howe and Lescage. Here, to my mind, the fallacy of the modernist theory is evident, and contradicts Mr. Howe's statement that it is not a style. Hood has adopted the theory of utter simplification but has set aside the formula. Here is the naked structure as left by the engineer, the architect having inserted acres—and acres of glass. It is naked and should be ashamed. Thousands of factories have been built exactly like it, but they are more interesting due to the limited height and long dimension, which give considerably more interest in repetition and general horizontal emphasis of mass. The window shades in this building offer the only relief from dreary monotony. On the other hand, the 35-story Philadelphia building by Howe shows the definite application of the modernist formula. I find cantilevered construction from top to bottom to allow of continuous horizontal planes of glass and concrete, an enormous glass area on the first and second floors, expressing the use of this space apparently for out-door banking. The transition from the lower spatial arrangement is made by means of a projecting slab some 50 feet in width, with perhaps 10 feet projection. This slab is introduced at the fifth floor level, and what machine function it has will remain a mystery to me. Furthermore, this building has its cube relations juggled in such a way as to make it obvious that an effect was desired independent of function, and, to my way of thinking, at a sacrifice of floor area. In other words, in the latter building, which should be a model of this style, I find that the pursuit of arbitrary forms and formulae is as definite as anything done by the traditionalist. I must insist that upon a comparison of these two buildings, the McGraw-Hill Building on the basis of theory is a finer building than that by Howe and Lescage, but I must add that it is the ugliest structure of any importance to be found in New York.

The traditionalist used to think that he had an extremely difficult problem in the tall building due to the requirement of most owners for an unobstructed area of glass on the ground floor, whereas the modernist insists upon this condition being fulfilled almost everywhere else. He has apparently hypnotized the owners into believing that this is all wrong, for we now find the modernist shoppes have a minimum of glass area, no inner vestibule, and in general they appear extremely exclusive. The main distinguishing feature is that they are different.

Indeed being different is essential to most modern architecture. Wherever possible your modernist uses methods the reverse of his predecessor. Instead of verticals he uses horizontals, instead of curves straight lines, in place of masses more or less elegantly rounded cubes. He multiplies unnecessarily the angles, insists upon corner windows, cantilever construction without reasonable excuse, etc. Simplification leads to poverty and poverty is a disease. The dearth of elements of articulation leads to the use of gas pipe, wire, glass, and naked steel as decoration unconsciously. What gives countenance to the lack of apparent stability, why is honest weight concealed, but to be different.

Recently anticipating the possibility or perhaps the necessity of going modern, I redesigned in this style a proposed residence, the sketches for which had been prepared in our office a few years ago. I succeeded in doing this, and indeed it was a source of some satisfaction to find that all I need to do was to be honest and then shuffle up the formulae and apply them as required. I said that I had been honest, yet in playing with the construction to obtain a certain effect of simplification, I used what I thought was a new stunt. It did not seem altogether practical at the time, but later on I discovered that it was one of the elements of the formulae



which I had omitted in my deck. I am certain, however, that this design was less honest than the original, and much more expensive in first cost and maintenance.

I have read a great deal about the perfection of design of the aeroplane and automobile—it seems the modernist, in looking at a machine, sometime thinks of the skin. I was interested to note a statement by Mr. Stout of the Ford Co. that the present design of aeroplanes is all wrong, that the propeller should be at the rear of the chassis. And, with reference to the automobile, why is the hood twice as large as it needs to be? French cars are at least consistent in this, but I think we like the stream-line effect of our Cadillacs and Auburns better. I am quite certain that body designers know little about machinery and care less. What they are after is the last word in stream-line effect and comfort consistent with use. They are considering grace, proportion, sense of motion, power, the intangible some thing which is the essence of design. The racing car, as a machine built for forward motion should be even more striking in design than the sport roadster, but it is not the case. The designer sensitive to refinements has not been called upon here. This racing car admittedly is a machine, not a thing of beauty. While simplification is a desirable characteristic in design of a certain type of structure, it should not apply to all any more than one material should become a standard for all structures. Simplification has been forced upon us to a large extent by the need for economy. The insistence upon it betokens a poverty of imagination, and becomes a trick of the faddist. When ornamentation is considered as texture and color it need not be costly. Indeed, if the products of machine mean anything to the modernist, why does he not use it after this fashion.

Large and continuous glass areas, such as appear to be part of the formula of the modernist, seem to me to be irrational from a practical standpoint. Even in factories, such as our motor car plants, the Cooper-Hewitt diffused lighting is essential indeed, due to the large floor areas, and I should imagine in many other types no dependence whatever is placed upon daylight. It has been so undesirable in some cases, due to the intense sunlight, that large areas of glass have been painted.

As to its therapeutic values, as a matter of health, it has been proved that the best quartz glass allows but 25% of the health-giving rays to pass through. Then why the large glass area, when a single unit 100 watt daylight electric bulb will give a room the same amount of the health-giving rays as 150 square feet of the best quartz glass, and can be depended upon 365 days of the year? Aside from this, in a cold climate is it reasonable to expect that the sun's rays will compensate for the heat losses?

As for the skin of the skeleton structure built for permanence, no material has as yet been offered which in large areas can take the place of masonry materials. Steel, aluminum, bronze—those have

been tested in small areas, but it would be impossible to predict their permanence for the entire covering. If this element has ever received careful consideration from every angle it was in Radio City. The fact that stone is being used proves that it is the best investment.

I am desirous of meeting the modernist half way. Let us confess that most current practice and much teaching of architecture is uncreative, imitative, eclectic and feeble. At its worst it is hypocritical, willing to steal, irresponsible, and withal conceited over it. Let us confess that we have had a jolt and a warning; but let us not forget that we are not machines, that the soul demands something which represents the joy and mystery of life. A cabbage, in any logical analysis, is a wonderful and beautiful plant, and some of us love it with corned beef; but it is a fact that we love the daisy, and the culture of the orchid is a science.

Let us not forget either that the laws governing the design of the beautiful form are still active, and while we have new materials, new methods, those laws are immutable. Architecture cannot be reduced to a formula if it is to remain an art. The state of mind prepared to receive the formula of the modernist would be beyond our present day conception. It is the state of mind—ruthless, exacting, precise, efficient, inhuman—in other words the machine. We have met characters of this type, and let us confess that, while we may admire them, we do not enjoy their company.

That it is possible to be a humanist and a modernist is proven in much of our present work. The transition from the Woolworth Building to the Empire State is not violent and there is no straining of the leash. The buildings at Cranbrook are modern, honest and human. Much of the modern work in Sweden has some respect for tradition, and again, Frank Lloyd Wright's Tokio Hotel is a modern creation adapted to conditions, a symphony in composition, construction, and in decoration. In Cret's work we note the tradition to the refined adaptation of motives in a purely personal refined manner indicative of rational progress in design.

In conclusion I wish to prophesy the failure of this new architecture, and the success of the humanist-modern. Our only regret will have been that Saarinen and Wright were not given an opportunity in our next World's Fair.

## Free Golf Outing

Bill Seeley, of the Builder's and Trader's Golf Committee, announces an invitation to V and T members, their families and friends, to a day of golf and other recreations at Lockhaven, formerly the Aviation Country Club, on Tuesday, June 21.

Architects are included in Bill's invitation, and he suggests that you bring your family and, if you choose, a picnic lunch. Ladies and children will be welcome. There will be golf, bathing, and a real

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## Eddie Ash Writes A Report

Detroit Office  
817 Fisher Bldg.,  
Detroit, Mich.

TO: National Chemical & Mfg.  
Co., Chicago, Ill.

FROM: Edward (William Alexander Botts) Ash.

SUBJECT: General Motors Trial  
Luminall White Paint.

Gentlemen:

I have a strange tale to relate and also a fine report to make to you regarding General Motors' trial of our Luminall White Paint. It saved me the cost of buying a new white linen suit for this summer and also a white hat to match but I am getting ahead of my story.

A while back I went to see Mr. Bill Phillips who is head of the General Motors Paint Committee. This Mr. Phillips is a swell fellow and he became very much interested in our wonderful paint when I told him a little bit about it. I did not go into a great deal of detail but, of course, told him how if all the General Motors factories were painted with it, because of its extreme whiteness and light reflection, it would save so much electricity that in a year, if this were put back in the line in Niagara Falls, it would turn the generators backwards and make the Falls crawl up hill. I also told him how it would never yellow and would dry quickly, and just a few of our selling points. He thought it sounded wonderful and he arranged for us to have a trial and have other people look at it and if it were one thousandth as good as I told him I am sure he would use it in all his plants.

He sent me to the Cadillac plant to see Mr. Zannoth, the Plant Engineer. I told Mr. Zannoth about the paint, and he is an interesting man who is right up on his toes, and he said, "Sure, we will try it right away." So he arranged for me to come to the plant this morning while his men made the trial. I said he was clever. He is. He probably listened to all I had to say and then figured in his own mind — 'maybe he is right and maybe he isn't' but anyway he picked quite a place to try it — the toilet in the heat treating room. He probably figured, "Well, if this is a



lousy paint it won't look so bad in there anyway."

So this morning bright and early I went over and took two gallons of Luminall with me. The spray machine was set up and they used a direct line from their factory for air pressure which is better than one hundred pounds pressure. This is an important point which you must remember when reading the balance of this report.

Everything went fine and we got about one quarter of the room sprayed and everything was going nice when all of a sudden the paint stopped coming through the hose. It was an old hose which evidently was blocked up so we all went out to look at the tank. Mr. Bliss, who is the Paint Foreman and had charge of the job, told me that probably they needed a new hose. Anyway the painter who was doing the spraying decided it would be best to blow the hose out and this is what we started to do. This one hundred pounds of pressure was applied and all of a sudden there was a noise and a beautiful fountain stream of our marvelous white Luminall went shooting skyward and hit the black ceiling of the heat treating room forty feet above our heads and made a perfect circle of white against the black and it was a marvelous demonstration of the covering and whiteness of our product. Needless to say, what goes up must come down, and after the stream had had its fun on the ceiling it started coming down on us and we all had a nice Luminall shower. As I said before, my dark blue suit was turned snow white and will make a beautiful summer suit for me. Also my black shoes were made into white shoes and my grey hat was made into a white one. If General Motors buy enough paint I can go down to Palm Beach and use this for my Palm Beach suit. Anyway it was a marvelous demonstration. We have a perfect circle of white against a deep black black on the ceiling, and nothing could show off our product better than this. There were lots of workmen in the heat treating room whom I bet have not had clean faces since starting work there many years ago but they are nice and white now.

This demonstration gave me a wonderful idea — we should make Luminall so cheap we could put it in a hose and shoot it on the ceiling and save the cost of a spray gun, and it also has many other advantages.

Anyway as soon as I saw this wonderful circle on the ceiling I got Mr. Zannoth and he came over and was so impressed

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by the demonstration that he immediately ordered six gallons with which to spray his restaurant ceiling. Because he wants it in such a hurry I am delivering it from my office today and ask that you send a bill to Cadillac Motor Car Company as soon as I send you their purchase order number. Ship me a case to replace this one.

I am going back this afternoon and finish the job, and have put on my other suit. If that gets white on it summer will have to hurry and come or else I will have to wear a sheet like Ghandi. Anyway, as I have said before, the demonstration was a marvelous success and I am sure that anybody who sees it will immediately want to buy more Luminall than you can turn out.

Your Star Salesman,

**Edward (William Alexander  
Botts) Ash**

P. S. — You had better wire me at once how much you want for the National Chemical Company because I think that very soon we will have an offer for it. You know Mr. Dupont, who owns a lot of General Motors stock, besides being a powder manufacturer, also makes paint. Some day Mr. Dupont might be walking through the heat treating laboratory at Cadillac and when he sees that beautiful white against the black he will immediately want to buy our company.

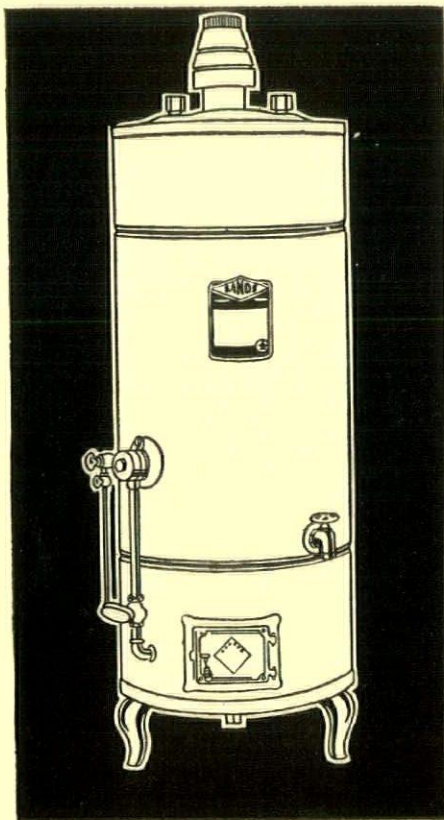
Through this trial I was able to discover a new use for Luminall. In cleaning up what Luminall came back down on the floor they used sawdust and when the sawdust got mixed with the Luminall the pine oil which we use with the Luminall gave off a very sweet aroma. I immediately filled three bags of this and took them to the man who keeps my dogs and he says that it is far better than the cedar shavings which he has been using. Therefore, I think we have a wonderful new outlet for our product. Whenever you get over production on Luminall just open the cans and mix it with sawdust and we can sell it to kennels to bed their dogs with.  
E. (W. A. B.) A.

#### TAU SIGMA DELTA ELECTS

The Alpha Chapter of Tau Sigma Delta announces the election of the following honor students at the University of Michigan:—

Christian Edwin Dill, Chesterland, Ohio, Landscape Design. William Elbert Brown, Dallas, Texas, Architectural Design. George Gulbrandsen, St. Johnsbury, Vt. Architecture. Martha Elizabeth Wheeler, Grand Rapids, Mich. Architecture. Miriam Finsterwald, Detroit, Mich. Decorative Design. Milda Charlotte Josenhans, Ann Arbor, Mich. Decorative Design. David William Klibanow, Chicago, Ill. Architecture. Clarence Alfred Schoen, New Albany, Ind. Decorative Design.

Mr. Ernest H. Trysell of Detroit is national secretary. Honorary faculty members of Alpha Chapter are Messrs. Herbert A. Fowler, Emil Lorch, William C. Titcomb and Aubrey M. Tealdi. Alumni faculty members are Messrs. Ralph W. Hammett, George M. McConkey and Harlow O. Whittemore.



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