



The Practice of Transformation

Enabling Fundamental Transformation of
the Self, the Organization and the Society:
A Four-World Approach

By Alexander Schieffer and Ronnie Lessem

The "Practice" in the title concerns transforming ourselves with the help of a unique process, culminating in a new form of enterprise. We thereby liberate the potential of people, organizations and societies.

Distinctive to this transformative approach is the link between the indigenous and the exogenous, where the local leads and the global follows. It is an approach that taps into the wisdom of the four corners of the world, and hence is embedded in the four worlds of the South, the East, the North and the West. In this worldly frame we always root transformation first within a local context and in local wisdom, before it encounters evolving global knowledge.

This framework also provides the basis for a unique program for mastering social and economic transformation, a program that helps build and support people who are willing to engage in deep transformation. Our program is already underway in South Africa, Jordan, and the UK.

The "Practice of Transformation" — which is embedded in a most coherent and integral transformational architecture — is built on seven fundamentals:

- 1) Forces
- 2) Foundations
- 3) Flows
- 4) Fields
- 5) Functions
- 6) Form
- 7) Freedom

“What if we quit arguing about the structure of a new institution and tried to think of it as having some sort of genetic code. How does genetic code in individual cells create recognizable patterns, yet never duplicate a single creature, leaf, blade of grass or even a snowflake? How does nature create infinite diversity within infinite patterns of infinite complexity?”

Dee Hock, *One From Many*¹

1. The Need for Transformation

The World is on Fire ...

We assert that the current way we run organizations and societies, as well as our own lives, needs fundamental transformation. In fact, we maintain that we have reached, in the new millennium, an age of transformation², an inflection point every bit as profound as the one Peter Drucker described or, perhaps, caused³ 50 years ago. Inertially bound leadership and management, without the fundamental transformation to which we refer, is an evolutionary cul de sac.

On our present course, in our view, we are — personally, organizationally and societally — cutting against the natural and the cultural grain or, more specifically, our physical and human natures. Given our drive to express our purpose and success in purely material terms, we lose touch with our natural and cultural life forces, and, in the process, with our origins. These then become dislodged from, rather than embedded within, local and global foundations.

This article primarily concerns the natural and the cultural. Secondly, it treats social and economic transformation. While many business leaders, social leaders and entrepreneurs may talk about the latter, if not the former, few understand what either really means, let alone know how to make transformation happen. In fact, with the exception of Japan in recent years, there is little appreciation of how societies transform themselves. So-called “transition” economies, be they Eastern European or Far Eastern, are not really transforming at all. They are merely changing from socialist to capitalist regimes and, in the process, becoming more “Western”, retaining dashes of their original uniqueness here and there.

This article is not about change, it is about *transformation*. Like the caterpillar turning into a butterfly, transformation involves becoming all that you yourself can deeply be. Unlike caterpillars, in our experience, human beings achieve this feat by connecting broadly with others. Such a transformation for us, whether Irish or Icelandic, Jamaican or Jordanian, involves realizing our individual, organizational and societal genius, through seven fundamentals of transformation...

... and “Gene-uine Entre-preneurs” are needed as agents of transformation.

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Agents of transformation are required in almost all respects; here we call them Gene-uine Entrepreneurs. If you return to the French roots of the term “entrepreneur”, you will find it’s a concatenation of two somewhat contradictory concepts: “entre” — link, connect, bridge — and “prendre” — comprehend, take hold of, exploit. All too quickly these yin-yang, feminine-masculine origins have become distorted in the latter direction. For us, then, the Gene-uine Entre-preneur is able:

- First, to **Ground** his or her enterprises in local soils;
- Second, to **Emerge** with ideas that link the local with the global;
- Third, to **Navigate** knowledge accordingly...
- Ultimately with a view to a transformative local-global **Effect**.

In order to realize such abilities, these agents of transformation need to balance dynamically the yin-yang elements built into entrepreneurship. Similarly, the macro environment in which the enterprise operates also needs a yin-yang foundation.

Without such a newly transformative base, naturally, culturally, politically and economically, such gene-uine entre-preneurs will be mere oases in a desert, rather than join the critical mass of transformational catalysts.

In his recent book *One from Many*, Dee Hock, the founder of VISA, describes the growing institutional failure throughout the world and the urgent need to create fully transformed institutions:

“... the Industrial Age embodies hierarchical and command-and-control institutions, which, just like fragmented knowledge, over the past four hundred years, have grown to dominate our commercial, political and social lives. These are becoming increasingly irrelevant in the face of the exploding diversity and complexity of society worldwide. They are failing, not only in the sense of collapse. But in the more common and pernicious form of failure, organizations increasingly are unable to achieve the purpose for which they were created. Yet they continue to expand as they devour resources, decimate the Earth and demean humanity.”⁴

Let us now take one step back, as we consider both the conventional meaning of transformation and what it then means for us.

One step back: The meaning of, and urge for, Transformation

In researching different definitions, we find that transformation can be seen as:

- A fundamental qualitative change;
- A function in mathematics that changes the position or direction of the axes of a coordinate system;
- A rule describing the conversion of one syntactic structure into another related syntactic structure;
- Genetic modification of a cell or bacterium by the uptake and incorpora-

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tion of exogenous DNA; or

- The act of changing in form or shape or appearance.

As agents of social and economic transformation we find these definitions do not advance us very much. Instead, we look at what transformation may mean particularly to us, and why it is particularly important now. Melting polar ice caps, many corporations lost in a world of unbridled greed, rising fundamentalism in societies, the increasing failure of international institutions, and growing fragmentation in lives not lived and in the world at large have provided us with the impetus and urgency to explore the theme of transformation.

It seems that we have come to a stage in our history where we have no choice but to alter the very perspective from which we view our world. This is transformation: not change that is done piece by piece, but a process that must be embedded in a locally vital force, globally founded, in flow-form, broadly fielded, wholly functional, integrally formed, and ultimately a route for freedom. Transformation must move us to another reality system, and shift the very basis of the issue. Our focus and concern is about enabling human beings to transform their selves, organizations, communities and societies from the inside out.

When we started searching for roadmaps and signposts we found few. As we approached the whole concept of transformation, we realized that there is simply no viable, simultaneously macro and micro, indigenous and exogenous model or framework that can be effectively utilized by anyone wishing to learn to use it as an individual and collective structure and process. Effectively, where transformation is concerned, it's as if we have all been left to our own devices. We stumble through it. It makes it all the more remarkable, therefore, when we find examples of the few, like Dee Hock at VISA, who actually have successfully engaged in the transformation process and created extraordinary changes in the world.

It's not that there are no references to transformation. They are numerous and extensive and range from the sublime to the ridiculous. From spiritual transformation to business transformation, from governments to sweatshops, from biologists to software engineers, from religious leaders to sex-change specialists — they all refer to transformation. Indeed the word transformation has become part of common parlance in organizations; and indeed in whole societies. But it tends to be used as a buzzword rather than a descriptor of change or metamorphosis at a much more fundamental level.

Transformation, not change: Four Premises of Transformation

To summarize our approach to transformation we list the following as our premises:

Premise 1: While change is a part of the process, *transformation is not change*. We best perceive and address transformation as a process rather than a thing in itself. This flies against conventional change management, which comes from a dominant mechanistic paradigm of change as something that can be switched on or implemented.

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Premise 2: The second premise is that *transformation is necessarily collaborative* and relationship-based. No individual entity can engage in transformation. Even at the level of the Self, the process of transformation must involve an engagement with the other that leads to a modification or recombination of the self to produce another form. To “trans-form” is literally that: to go beyond the original form. As we progress we shall go deeper into what the “other” is and we shall be referring to it as the exogenous.

Premise 3: *Transformation is a fundamental alteration of the very perspective from which we exist, think, act, and live.* Literally it is the creation of a new reality in combination with the old one. Therefore, there needs to be a definition of the historical, natural, and cultural perspectives, as well as a process by which the Old can reach out to the politically and economically New.

Premise 4: Finally, our fourth premise is that *transformation is an integrative process and follows the evolutionary pattern of moving to greater complexity.* Therefore, it necessarily depends upon difference. Logically, integration needs differentiation for it to happen. If all things were the same, there would be no pattern of transformation possible.

The core transformational motor: The GENE of Transformation

In our own research and development — in the UK, the Middle East, China, and South Africa — we have evolved such a pattern, which we have called the GENE (Grounding, Emerging, Navigating and Effecting) of transformation. This flow embodies the above-mentioned premises and is applied in various forms, always as an integrative process that connects local and individual identity with global integrity. In that context we talk about releasing the transformative GENE-ius of the Self, the Organization, and the Society. This is ultimately why we have developed our transformation program for the gene-uine entre-preneur.

However, in order to effect true transformation we need to understand its fundamentals. These fundamentals are neither taught in lower school nor at universities. Transformational knowledge is missing just in those areas where it is most needed: in business and economics, in the public sector and politics, as well as in the traditional educational arena.

Overcoming boundaries and fragmentations with the help of the GENE

Real Transformation can take place only if we overcome the extremely fragmented perspective that we hold upon ourselves, our organizations, our societies and on the world. We need to understand ourselves more integrally as human beings, with our own inner and outer transformation processes. We would also want to develop a more integrated perspective on our organizations, by not isolating them in different sectors (public, private, civic, environmental, etc.). Ultimately, there is a need to reframe the traditional perspective of the world that ap-

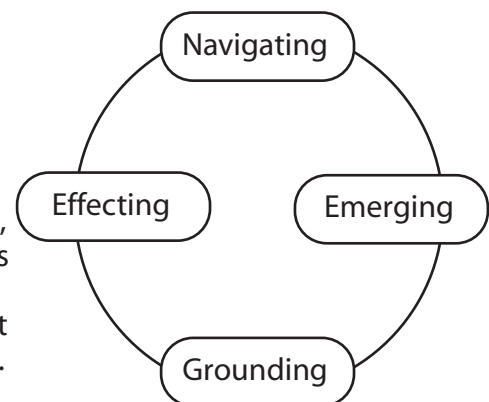


Figure 1: The GENE-ius of Transformation

plies to each particular society, or else such a society runs the risk of leaving vital transformative value behind.

In order to be sustainable, transformation needs to go down to the roots — of the individual, the organization and the society. It must build on the individual/societal transformative force, as much as it needs to be rooted in natural and cultural foundations. Having said this, it becomes clear that transformational knowledge is equally based on indigenous and exogenous knowledge, meaning it needs to be rooted in the four corners of the world, not just in one.

There is no one-way of transformation does not follow a one-way vector. While we are tapping into local indigenous and global exogenous knowledge and thereby equally building on the four corners of the world — the South, the East, the North and the West—we end, not start, as is usually the case, in the West. Ultimately, we offer an entirely new approach towards globalization.

Doing so, we add to the one-sided MBA-driven management educational arena our Master of Management in Social and Economic Transformation. We mention this here, as this article and a forthcoming companion book⁵ provide a base for a new kind of educational program designed to support individuals, organizations and societies to succeed in their own transformational journeys. But let us first describe what the transformational process is all about; let us now turn to the seven fundamentals of transformation.

2. The Fundamentals of Transformation

Overview: From Forces to Freedom

Based on local and global knowledge transformation processes in individuals, organizations, and societies, and on many years of research, practice and running education programs all over the world, we have identified seven fundamentals of transformation. These fundamentals — holding the flow of the GENE in its center — form the basic framework for our ever-growing transformative knowledge base.

The starting point of the transformational process, for us, are vital inner **Forces** of transformation. These Forces need to be deeply rooted in the underlying **Foundations** of social and economic transformation. For us these Foundations are nature and culture. It is the Forces through their connection with the Foundations that serve to initiate the **Flows** of living processes and systems, where the GENE flows. We already have introduced the GENE concept: it is the most central flow, embodying the transformation principles identified in nature and culture. Such a Flow arises out of the meeting of the local and the non-local. Such a fusion of horizons, in culture as opposed to nature — where symbiosis is prolifically in evidence — is very much the exception rather than the rule. Ironically, we find the key to such a cultural renaissance, whether in Europe in the arts and sciences in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, or in Japan in technology and management in the twentieth century, is in just such a fusion, between North and South in the one case, East and West in the other.

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Surrounding those Forces, Foundations, and Flows, moreover, are what we term the **Fields** of self, organization and society. Specifically, the natural and cultural flow of our collective or individual lives, as such, is being blocked or

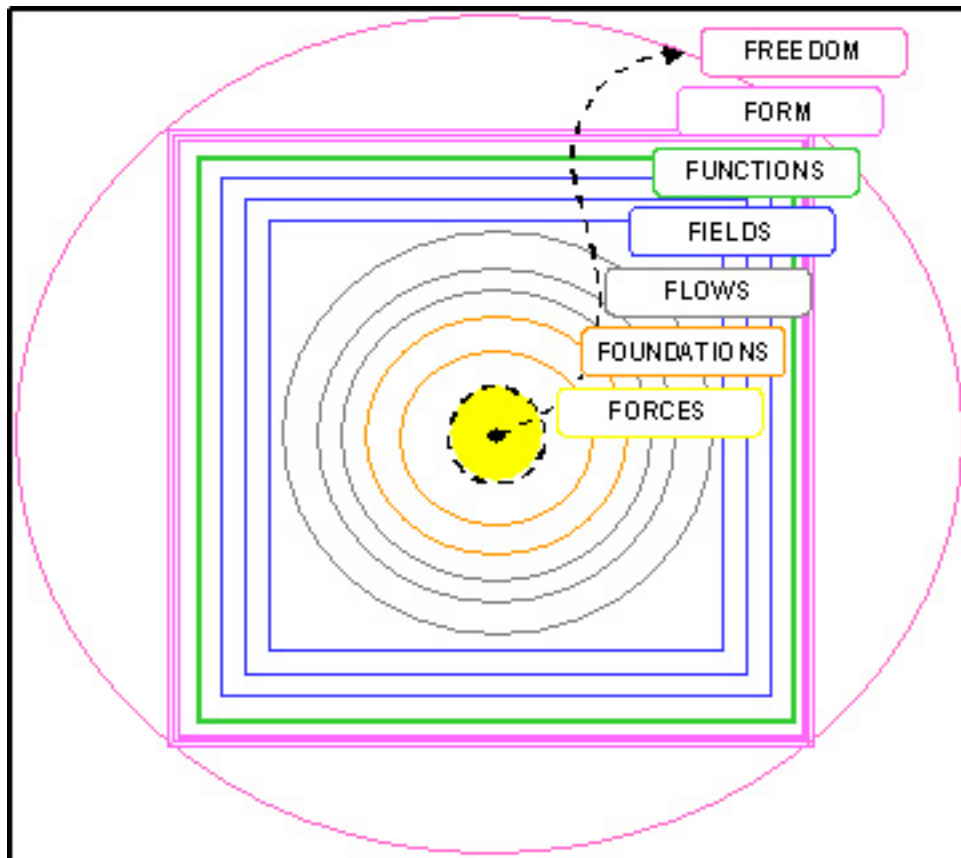


Figure 2: The 7 Fundamentals of Transformation

distorted by the un-natural and de-culturalized rhythms that surround us. In the process and in our transformative terms, poverty, disease, terrorism and malaise can be linked with the disparity — as opposed to the integrity — between the natural and cultural, and the political and economic. For example, many indigenous peoples of Latin America are being dislocated from their local nature, without becoming enriched. Thereby, they lose their ways of Old and find themselves in the New through an evolving local-global culture. They will subsequently and invariably be debilitated by a corrupted indigenous, or imposed exogenous, political regime. They will ultimately be economically deprived by misconceived policies and programs promoted by disconnected and/or corrupted elites, reinforced by a “Washington Consensus”, both of which are all too likely to be out of alignment with themselves and with others. The flow of their lives, their leadership and their learning will be deformed, rather than transformed. As a result, their individual and collective **Functions** will be inhibited. *Community building, conscious evolution, knowledge creation and sustainable development will be thwarted.* In other words, dysfunctional communities, dysfunctional consciousness, dysfunctional knowledge and dysfunctional development will prevail. The broad focus of people, institutions

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and communities, as such, will narrowly and superficially center merely on the material or spiritual, as opposed to a newly achieved broadly and deeply natural, cultural, social and economic **Form**.

Finally, any lack of fundamental transformation will result in inauthentic rather than authentic **Freedom**, that is, freedom for the few, outwardly, rather than freedom for the many, both inwardly and also outwardly. For freedom to take authentic root, it needs to be specifically and intrinsically lodged, in culture and nature locally and non-locally. We consider a new kind of genuine entre-preneur, and gene-uine enter-prise to be the ultimate facilitators of such transformations in the long run.

We now turn to each one of the transformational fundamentals, starting with the local vital Forces, and ending with what we term authentic Freedom. You will note that each fundamental then follows its own specific Fourfold, whereby the Grounding (South), Emerging (East), Navigating (North) and Effecting (West) will always act as a natural parallel rhythm. Each Fourfold stands for an integrative aspect within the entire transformational process.

Transformational Forces: From Ubuntu to Individuation

Vital Forces in a particular self, organization or society initiate the transformative process, individually and collectively, providing the indigenous and primary, natural and cultural initiative for social and economic transformation. It is here where the transformational GENE-ius is activated first.

It is this indigenous vitality of each society, of each individual and organization, that needs to be initially engaged with if the local to global process is to subsequently, and prospectively, arise.

This is precisely what goes begging in so many so-called transformation programs. Historically, this phenomenon of either ignoring this local transformation force or exoticising it at the expense of authenticity has been one of the main fallouts of colonization. Ultimately the colonial process was about occupying the indigenous mind, rather than building upon the universality of nature and culture. The result was, and continues to be, colonization or adaptation, that is, “think global, act local,” rather than transformation, whereby the local builds on the universal, prior to engaging, as we shall next see, with the non-local.

SOUTHERN VITAL FORCE	EASTERN VITAL FORCE	NORTHERN VITAL FORCE	WESTERN VITAL FORCE
Example: <i>Ubuntu</i>	Example: <i>Kyosei</i>	Example: <i>Naringsliv</i>	Example: Individuation

The transformation force then provides context and vitality for the transformation, the base, and a home where the process originates. The force that is held in the culture and nature of a society, and indeed in a person or in an institution, is like the roots that go deep and wide. This is the uniqueness of

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each; the vital forces that carry the imprint of its transformative potential. What is special about each one is the very identity that underlies such a soul force. In Africa this is termed a “vital force”, in Europe the French philosopher Bergson has referred to an “élan vitale”, and, in Asia, it is the energy of Chi in China, or in India the force of Dharma.

Specifically, then, in the context of our transformation process, such a vital force in the “South” is embodied, for example, in *ubuntu* (“I am because you are”) of the Bantu peoples; in the “East” in Japanese *kyosei* (co-existence and co-evolution); in the “North” in Swedish *naringsliv* (economic and social network); and in the “West” in American or western European *individuation* (realizing our individual and collective selves). Any transformation process in a locality must be contextualised within this vital force. The force must both imbue and inform the transformative process. However, to take the transformational story on, the force of identity needs to be fused together with unifying foundations of global integrity.

Transformational Foundations:

Tapping upon Nature and Culture in the South, East, North and West

Transformative Foundations (Nature and Culture), on a global basis, form the exogenous and secondary base for the transformational journey and nourish the vital forces. It is here where the “transformational traveller” starts reaching out to the exogenous knowledge of the world, tapping simultaneously on the South, the East, the North and the West. In other words, *unlike the monolithic nature and*


North			
West	Rational: The power to make logical inferences, whereby reason is a source of power independent of sense perceptions, based on deduction through a priori concepts, rather than via empiricism.		East
	Pragmatic: The practical treatment of things, emphasising the application of ideas, whereby thought is a guide to action, and the truth is empirically tested by the practical consequences of belief.		
	Holistic The belief that the determining features in nature are wholes, that organisms progressively develop, is irreducible to the sums of their parts, but function in relationship to them.		
Humanistic: Asserts the dignity of the human, promoting human and social welfare, incorporating the arts and humanities, fostering self-fulfilment in the context of collective and community relations			
South			

Figure 3: The Four Worlds, archetypal, with their particular dominant contribution to the World

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scope of globalization, what we term “globality” incorporates exogenous essences from the South, East, and North as well as the West. These serve to constitute our global foundations, a unity-in-variety, as opposed to a monolithic foundation.

Our transformational approach is distinctive in its explicit link between the indigenous and the exogenous, where the one leads and the other follows. We start with local individual identity, and lead into global integrity. Any great society is not one particular nationality but a composite of peoples, a melting pot, a “salad bowl” or “rainbow” society. Little, for example, do the advocates of “Little Britain”, devoid of Asian or Afro-Caribbean peoples, realize that such a Britain, from the historical outset, was composed of Angles, Saxons, Celts, Normans and Vikings, and more. Similarly Japan, economically at least, only began to rise from its slumber when “East” and “West” were fused. Whatever the indigenous vital force, it needs to build on exogenous foundations if transformation is to ensue. In fact, invariably such foundations are imbalanced, disturbed, or indeed broken, which calls for a new variety-in-unity, in between the local forces and the global foundations.

As such, and as will be elaborated upon later, we draw upon a fourfold foundation, or archetype, of nature and culture, that has been embraced by all civilizations over the millennia, ranging from the “medicine wheel”, with its four directions — East and West, North and South — in native Indian culture, to the four personality types — choleric and melancholic, sanguine and phlegmatic — amongst the ancient Greeks. Building on global knowledge sources, we have distilled the Four Worlds Archetype (see Figure 3), which reflects the dominant expressions of mankind literally in the four corners of the world, and metaphorically and, of course, in endless variations in each of us. For us these global foundations are part of the trans-cultural, exogenous basis for integration, as opposed to the prior vital forces that serve to differentiate. Such differentiation and integration, for us the authentic platform for the meeting of the local and the non-local, provides the authentic basis for the global.

SOUTH	EAST	NORTH	WEST
Local Indigenous	Local / Global Indigenous Exogenous	Global Exogenous	Global / Local Exogenous Indigenous

This process has been beautifully described by Ibrahim Abouleish of Sekem, one of the prime examples we build on: “During my studies, in fact, I noticed inner changes taking place within me. I became thoroughly involved with European culture, getting to know its music, studying its poetry and philosophy. Somebody looking into my soul would have seen anything ‘Egyptian’ left completely behind, so I could absorb everything new. Because of my childhood and adolescent grounding, though, in Egyptian culture, I could not leave such entirely behind. I now existed in two worlds, both of which were essentially different: the oriental, spiritual stream I was born into and the European, which I felt was my chosen course. But I was neither Egyptian nor European.

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I realized this particularly when I was experiencing art. For example, I started hearing Händel's Messiah with Muslim ears as praise to Allah. The two differing worlds within me gradually began to dissolve and merge into a third entity, so I was neither completely one nor the other. What I experienced was not a cheap compromise, but an elevation, a real uniting of the two cultures within me."⁶

This is also the stage where we began to decipher the links between the transformative process and the four worlds. For those of you who have not seen it yet, we created a holistic, trans-cultural and integrative model in the nineties, which became known as the Four Worlds model. Each of the "worlds", North, South, East and West, is a part of an integrative whole and is inter-dependent on each other. The four attributes we had were as follows: South embodies the natural and humanistic world; East the cultural and holistic; North the rational and political; the West the pragmatic and economic. That is the positive aspect. Each world, of course, has its corresponding downside: that is, the negative side of Southern tribalism, eastern mysticism, northern regimentation, and western materialism — when isolated from the other worlds. Meanwhile, we placed the weight of emphasis in grounding in the South; emergence in the East; navigating in the North; and effecting in the West. The transformation process became a journey through the four worlds starting from the South and manifesting in the West. And then we had our big "Ah-ha!" moment: the pattern we are describing here is precisely the journey that humankind has taken in its evolution from Rift Valley. The evolution of human life and its transformation has simply followed the same evolutionary principle, from South onto the East, onwards to the North and finally West, except that this is cultural evolution. There is a balance at work here: *the four worlds that hold the transformation journey from grounding to effecting must exist together; each one validating and legitimating its partner in maintaining the overall health of the world*. Damaging this balance has the same effects as damaging the environment. As in nature, so in culture.

To be concluded next week.

Endnotes

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