**Infostress in the Global Village**

**Door Gerard Feller**

We are living in the information age. Without a doubt modern business is dominated by information. People are ‘swimming’ in information. The ever increasing possibility for various media to replace or interchange with each other leads to ‘snacking media consumers’ and ‘digital nomads.’ We are overrun by emails, advertisements, cell phones, newsletters, reports, pleasing films, weblogitems, interesting links, internet, TV, hyves, twittering (see below) and many more. The integration of ’old’ and ‘new’media increases all the time, involving both analogue and digital information, both ‘clicks’ and ‘bricks’. Just as the BBC advertising uses the Martini claim – Anytime, Anyplace and Anywhere, access to information is no problem. Those who know, no longer speak of ‘information overload’ but rather of ‘information underload’ and ‘dataoverload”.(1) In the last thirty years more information has been produced than in all the preceding years. Research of TNO indicates that 43% of all work and job related complaints are caused by so-called infostress, which is caused by the fact that our brain can only cope with one-fifth of the information it receives. With all this information we are overrun by a different mentality as source of information which is overlooked by many Christians. They have become confused because this mentality of information is seldom sifted, dealt with or tested. Confusion everywhere: even people who are long-time Christians among other things are beginning to have doubts about their fundamental truths. In this article I want to discuss various developments, dangers and possibilities of the digital age.

**‘Screenagers’ in the digital age.**

The dream of media fanatics, namely the integration of internet and television has arrived. The consumer has awakened and is consuming media as if it were fast food. Infostress, choicestress, and blogstress are present and it is not easy to lick the habit, because media is just like the weather: good and bad, but always and everywhere. Multitasking in the pas t meant combining watching TV with reading the paper or eating a TV dinner. Multitasking today is much more – it could be simultaneously watching films, sending messages, reading news and blogs and downloading music to internet and a cell phone. There is a continual stream of mediaknowledge and infofacts which attack us from an increasing number of digigadgets. Just like we call eating and drinking all day ‘grazing’, we can also call digital ‘snacking’ grazing. You just grab what appeals to you. You don’t buy a whole album of music. Today you download your special songs, ring tones and videos. In Japanese cities more and more young people have withdrawn from public places. More than a million Japanese between twenty and thirty never leave their bedrooms. Hikikomori is the name for this phenomenon, which means ‘social withdrawal’. Cooped up in their rooms and connected to their computers and internet these ‘screenagers’ are thus connected to the outside world.(2) While the pressure of media escalates these young people turn aside from the news. The youngest generation seeks gratification solely by themselves. In three essays titled ‘Boeiuh’, ‘Chilluh’, and ‘Pimpuh’ Rob Wijnberg describes with a sharp and critical view the present day culture through the eyes of the youth. Wijnberg is convinced that the youth of today suffers from ‘data overload’. Much more disturbing is what he understands this to be, as evidenced by the pages long analysis of all the available ‘makeover’, ‘pimp-my’ and ‘reality’ programs (like three times *Temptation Island)* (3) and ‘Hollandse Krijgers”. Boeiuh indicates non-interest and apathy. ‘Chilluh’ points to mental and physical passiveness, but at the same time to open-mindedness, moderation and scepticism. ‘Pimpuh’ means an elevation of your own identity and combining materialism, hedonism and individualism. Wijnberg analyses the breeding ground of this threesome: our civilisation. The excess of information which hammers these young people to death. The blurring of the difference between news and amusement creates scepticism and distrust. The whirlpool of opinions and ideas leaves the youth with two possibilities: either irresponsibly going along with the waves of public debate or simply shrugging their shoulders.

**Digital pleasure.**

In the field of multimedia everyday there is something new, something faster, something better, something more fun. The web apps tumble over each other. Yesterday it was pod-casting; today it is twittering. **Twittering** is a popular program which has blown over from the United States. It combines webblogging with instant messaging and is therefore called ‘microblogging’. Twitter was started in October 2006 by *Obvious Corp,* a new industry in San Francisco. The basic question of this initiative is “What are you doing?” There are people who declare immediately that they are present at an event and will twitter with others who are not present at that event. This creates a virtual presence (4). There is communication about what is being eaten, where one is walking, what one is thinking, complete nonsense. You do this by posting a message – maximum 140 symbols – which is called ‘tweeds’. This can not only be done via the site, but also per sms or various other instant messaging programs. Just as with hyves (5) you can add twitter to your own network enabling you to always know what is happening. The makers of the Sony Playstation Portable (PSP) have made their apparatus in the form of a mobile telephone (cell phone?). Those who have that kind of apparatus can even have video conversations with other PSP users who are in the neighbourhood using a wifi hotspot for wireless internet. (6) Media players, like mp3 players, won’t need a hard memory in the future since they will be connected to internet via wifi. Every platform from (internet) television to cellphone to mp3 player to radio offers inventive ways to make life ‘pleasanter’. The functions of the various apparatus’s are not limited. Each game console can be a telephone and a television or can have a keyboard. Interesting is that the difference between ‘online’ and ‘offline’ becomes uncertain. Voices in the supermarket, a job interview on internet, making a date via your cellphone – this is all possible. (7) The newest development is no longer the integration of various digital means, but the combination of online and offline as seen in President’s Choice and Reactee. (8)

**Infostress and doing business.**

It’s not only teenagers who have infostress. As already mentioned, information dominates the business world. Most people are experiencing daily that they are getting too much information. Managers probably never complain about infostress. Whoever is best informed gets promoted. Younger employees who prove to be able to give much more effective attention to information are the ones who are noticed by those in management circles. Often one becomes frustrated as a result of not being able to find certain information when you know for sure that it is there somewhere. The amount of information on internet doubles every two years. And the user sometimes loses lots of time just trying to verify the trustworthiness of information.

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| **Heel veel information is** (9) |   |
| Size | Example |
| Kilobyte (1000 bytes) | A short story |
| Megabyte (1000 kilobytes) | A short novel |
| Gigabyte (1000 megabytes) | Beethoven’s Fifth |
| Terabyte (1000 gigabytes) | All the rontgen fotos |
| Petebyte (1000 terabytes) | Half the contents of all academic libraries USA |
| Exabyte ( 1000 petabytes) | All words ever spoken by man – 5 exabytes |
| Zettabyte (1000 exabytes)  | As much info as the grains of sand on all beaches |
| Yottabyte ( 1000 zettabytes) | Same amount of info as the atoms in 7000 bodies |
|   |   |
| The average hard disc of a computer is 16GB. During his life the average Netherlander uses 4GBof information. Only in the last year we have together produced 2GB for every citizen of the world.The first 12 exabytes of information came into existence during world history up to just a few years ago. The following 12 exabytes of information needed only 2 1/2 years and the next 12 exabytes will be reached in one year. Source: [www.sims](http://www.sims.berkeley.edu/).berkeley.edu |

Employees and employers recognize that work pressure is one of the major risks at work. (10) The structure of work has changed. Now many more people are sitting for hours at a monitor, including time at home outside the normal working hours, and with a laptop on their lap in the train. PC’s that have broken down produce very much stress. FNV (Dutch labor union) associates reported on their website the results of an investigation on computer aggression, the so-called Technology Related Anger, complaints of anger, frustration, loss of time and sizable costs. Flexibilitating of work leads to shifting the ‘biological clock’, longer working hours, night work. Also uncertainty over the future of work is a stress factor. In addition to general work related stress sources such as extreme work pressure, inadequate training and monotony, working with a computer produce special sources such as technical difficulties and electronic control of the performance of the employees. Complaints of being rushed, fear, anger, physical complaints and reduced quality of work are the result. Typical complaints by infostress are: nervous exhaustion, inability to relax, physical exhaustion, worrying, problems with sleeping, increased irritability, stomach and intestinal complaints, headaches, dizziness and many more. These can be called non-specific complaints, that is to say, they could all be caused some other way but too often infostress as the cause is overlooked. When these reactions grow out of proportion they disturb social functioning and functioning at work and in this case we speak of psychic conditions. At times personality, private situations and other factors also play a not unimportant role.

**Christians and infostress in the church.**

As a psychosomatic therapist I encounter more and more Christians for treatment who have complaints of nervous exhaustion for which it is clearly evident that infostress has played an important role. This can be the inability to cope with data, choices, processing, sifting information, the feeling of not always being up-to-date with the latest information or the impossibility of always having an instant ‘Christian’ answer or standpoint for all the problems of the world. This brings about a form of exhaustion in their Christianity. Doubt is produced by postmodern info mentality, in which everything becomes relative and all truth becomes subject to doubt, as a result of devastating nihilism. Everything that you claim can be recalculated on the internet or can be manipulated via info. At times it becomes difficult to resist the influence of the flood of the mentality of this age. In the same way a Christian who has served his church or other Christian organisation faithfully for years can suddenly begin to have doubts about elementary truths of his faith. He underestimates the pressure and mentality of this age which is hidden in the flood of information which he experiences. Even Christian journalists, apologetics and preachers who work with this quantity of information are extra vulnerable for the spiritual results of infostress. It leads to a impersonalizing, to doubting the identity and truth of their past. They are in danger of isolation, withdrawal and become disoriented. These doubts make them increasingly easy targets for manipulation and power struggles within their churches or organisation, after which they personally and from the attitude of other Christians consider themselves “finished” and eventually become completely the victims of serious nervous exhaustion. Plenty of rest and contemplation in the therapy is needed to recover from this exhaustion, which has not only spiritual aspects but also psychic and physical symptoms, as I have described above. It takes a lot of work to restore Biblical priorities in their lives and to once more recognize God’s voice. It often takes months, sometimes years, to recover full health. Many times the individual never regains his original “old self” and thereby much experience, wisdom and knowledge is lost to the churches and organisations. The prince of the spirit of this age achieves his victories and claims his victims! Attention for these processes, making choices regarding infostreams, good organisation and relating to and praying with others for protection, social solidarity, sermons on information and preventive measures about specific dangers of infostress are all important in resisting the mentality of this age. This is only possible when we place our spirit under the Holy Spirit and receive the spirit of Christ which is stronger than the spirit of the world. ( I John 4:1-6)

**Modern Industrial Sicknesses** (11)

**Mousearm** (Repetitive Strain Injury)

Pain in the shoulders and arm joints resulting from extended work at a PC. It is estimated that 20 to 40% of professionals suffer from some form of RSI.

**Dented thighs** (lipoatrophia semicirckularis)

Ribs (or dents) in the upper leg as a result of friction between the desktop and leg or from the electromagnetic radiation of the PC. This was discovered in 1975 already in a group of Austrian women.

**Acoustic shock**

Employees using the telephone for long periods as a result of suddenly hearing loud sounds in their headsets get problems with headaches, dizziness and depressions. British Telecom in England has already had to pay out thousands in damages.

**Voice – RSI**

Irritation of the vocal cords following a voice recognition program which was designed to eliminate the normal form of RSI

**Mobil Telephone Ears**

The excessive use of a cell phone can lead to harm to the brain and can even cause cancer. The average cell phone carries more bacteria than the average toilet seat!

**Infostress**

Exhaustion, anger and frustration caused by the exaggerated influx of information via modern media.

**Infostress from the new electronic world (12)**

Futurlogians confirm it: humanity is at the point of declaring a collective state, which can accomplish far more than is possible for the individual. This collective mentality gets its start through the process of political globalisation for which the beginning stage can be found in the cooperation of television, telephone and computer. Computer technology with all of its possibilities of simulation (virtual reality) and (neural) networking will lead to a macro-organism for which people will be the cells. Internet can be considered to be the embryonic phase of this collective mentality. The collective consciousness will develop out of the simultaneous communication between human brains via cable networks, tele-communication systems, databanks and cybernetic ‘thinktanks’ (Cybernetica = the science of the regulation of organisms and machines). Four characteristics will guide this process: decentralisation, globalising, harmonising and the use of power.

Marshall McLuhan, one of the earliest internetfuturlogions, said: “The speed of electricity has the tendency to eliminate time and space in human consciousness. Each incidence affects the other without delay. You can call the computer the electrical extension of the nervous system that creates the combined field of organically connected structures and this we call the information age. Systems using this type of information such as computers, satellites and videos are extensions of specific crucial psychological characters of our mentality. With this in mind you can call them the technologians of the psyche or psycho- technologians.

For some these assertions go far too far, but the fact that there are extremely fast developments of this nature nobody can deny. In 2002 already I wrote in our magazine ‘Promise’: “Christians who are in this world but not of this world are flooded with this new consciousness. Specifically in this age is it extremely important to have spiritual discernment and a Christian ethic and morality in order to determine how we should conduct ourselves in this digital revolution. This is especially so because a new world consciousness coupled with all sorts of powers, signs and deceiving miracles leading to widespread tempting unrighteousness will accompany the world rule of the antichrist.” (2 Thess.2:9)

Take for example the ‘simple’ influence of television. When we sit in front of the TV we are required to react psychologically and emotionally; with the radio is that different. While the television reaches into our spiritual being, computerised opinion polling reaches into our ‘social being’. With the help of the computer is the choice of television programming resulting from instantaneous research networks and systems for checking response closer to us than most of us realize. Researches, viewing figures, mail research, surfing habits, purchasing results largely determine the psychology of the average. When the time comes that television, computer and internet are even more integrated concerning essential matters then the psychological opinion about these matters will not be created by us but for us.

The polling of opinion does not have only the function of formulating the opinion of a group but also to mould or even determine our personal opinion. In the same way that electronic media ignores physical and geographical borders, the electronic infostream ignores our personal borders. An invasive beam destroys to a large degree our psychological resistance mechanism and undermines the fences of our personal identity. Because our thinking process is influenced by the structures of information producing systems (‘The Medium is the message”), the psycho-technologians create the requirement of an expanded self that evolves out of the original self. (13) The electronic world mentality is getting closer.

The electronic worldview that is built on information technology is particularly an evolutionary, biochemical and materialistic view. Peter Scheele reminds us in his book ‘Degeneration, the end of the theory of evolution’ of the law of Midas: this is the inability to discover a higher level which results from the reductionistic way of looking at things.

This is true regarding the existence of a Creator, a God who is independent from his creation. Materialism which is packaged in a neurological, symbiotic, biochemical chaos theory is the denial of the existence of the highest level, by which one discovers that there is nothing left over. (14) If life is nothing more than a complicated biochemical reaction, then there is also no moral responsibility.

Man’s mentality cannot be scientifically framed or even measured. Mentality can only be discerned by the Spirit (I Corinthians 2:6-16). Behind every bit of information there is always a mentality of information. Digital images, sound, frequencies and wavelengths are nothing more than bearers of a message. The mentality behind biochemicalism and symbiotism can not be captured in a voice recognizing system. Here follow some moral dangers which the developing worldmentality causes:

**1) Autonomy**

(Genesis 3:22-24) Man appears to be developing as a being who has more control over his surroundings. The world seems to be getting smaller. Man begins to have what looks like divine attributes such as omnipresence, power to create, and losing the limitations and boundaries of his body and existence.

**2) Identity crisis**

In one way this leads to an enlarged “I”, but in contrast there is no longer a clear difference between God, me and the rest of the world. Or between reality and unreality, between space and the boundaries of time. (See Romans 1:18 vv) A person can assume different identities in different situations.

**3) World view**

As has been said, man is flooded with a materialistic, reductionistic, symbiotic and evolutionary world view by which he is distancing himself ever further from the realisation that we live in God’s world and that we are responsible to Him about how we treat ourselves, others and His creation. The mentality prevailing in the world and which is temporarily developing is not from God’s love but from a mentality of “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye and the pride of life” (I John 2:15-16).

**4) Unreality**

This happens as a result of ongoing diminishing the borders between reality and virtuality. The V.R. (virtual reality) technology is still relatively primitive but is developing explosively. It has become steadily easier to reduce the time between conception and performance or even to reduce it to real time. Everything can be achieved. Now already one of the greatest problems in public health is the fact that many people are living in a dream. In addition the unbounded relativity as a reaction to modernism has resulted in denying knowledge of reality; there is only a perception of reality.

People no longer have a healthy Biblical vision of a harmonious balance between earthly and spiritual reality (15). Many are living in a false world into which they have fled with all their psychiatric problems such as fears, phobias, depression, compulsive neuroses, schizophrenia or dissociative complaints. Every apparent or manufactured reality will cause them to flee further into a manipulated anti-Christian world mentality or into further splitting of their human personality. When this becomes isolated it results in a breaking with true life. Viewing true life (Jesus said: ”I am the life.”) as strange or unreal brings on a love for the world of spirits. When one experiences indifference and insensitivity then spontaneously visions, hallucinations and various transcendental incidents will follow. Together with indifference, fear also enters into life. Such fear creates added energy for the inhabitant of the global village with which he becomes even more estranged from true life. It also is the cause of conflict for him between fear of loneliness and fear for intimate friendship. He can no longer cope with pressure and does not tolerate being corrected. And all of this while at the same time the responsibility and freedom to make decisions produces even more fear. Those who have fled into the world of spiritism develop a scary superstition about spirits, mysterious powers and those sorts of things. Indifference regarding suffering leads to a tormenting fear of death and pain. (16) Pope Benedict warned recently during a visit to the Thaise bishops for the dangers of globalisation. According to him, globalisation does not lead to a feeling of world solidarity, but to “fragmenting and the kind of individualism which promotes secularation. That secularisation marginalises that which is holy and disguises the source of all harmony and unity in the universe” (17). I hope that he meant by this God, the creator of heaven and earth.

**Increasing concentration of power.**

Characteristics of the new world consciousness were decentralisation, globalising, harmonising, and the exercise of power. Owing to the fact that the computer continually knows more about man (bioscan, voice recognition, irisscan, monetary traffic, pastimes, inquiries, satellite, video, etc.) it is becoming easier to also have control over each individual. Identity fraud happens more and more in the digitalised world. Financial transactions are being done digitally. The factor of authenticity becomes important. Are you who you say you are? Criminality and terrorism involves look-a-like fraud. Because of the many excesses in this field there is a growing need for better authenticity and identification. Through switching of identity there are people in prison who were not the perpetrators. (Ned. Dagblad 9-8-08) In America there is a large scale fraud involving identity in the credit card system. This has resulted in an appeal for identification by means of biometric and chip technology according to Jaap Spaans via his website ([www.jaapspaans.nl](http://www.jaapspaans.nl/)). Following this idea numerous cities are now widely using surveillance cameras which make use of biometric facial recognition. By using very sensitive info rays it is increasingly possible to manipulate and observe the modern man. “Brainwashing” a population has, since the cultural revolution of Mao using his so-called info bombardment and public confession of guilt, been further perfected to a world-wide level. The ruler of the world fascinates, dominates and manipulates the world ever more with an antichristian mentality and whips the nations and world leaders up against God into their own autonomy. (Psalms 2:1-3)

**Changing the paradigm**

Through this new world mentality man is quickly taught a new image of man, the world and god. Through the cultural image and new ways of thinking man falls easily into consumptionism, hedonism, compulsion for control, shallowness and the satisfaction of every desire. (Mark 7:20-23). Modern man is growingly sensitive for world-wide stimulation coming from the electronic world mentality. There is therefore less and less ‘seeking’, ‘searching’, ‘standing firm’, ‘discovering’, ‘trying’ and ‘tasting’ of and for God’s will. (Psalm 1:2; Psalm 34). Due to the steadily increasing integration of cultures, religions and nations the Biblical image of God becomes even more vague. Christians, as well, fall victim to heresy, and to the mentality of quick and easy solutions and miracles instead of a godly life of love and suffering through which one grows into Christian maturity in dependence on God. They do not learn to “destroy strongholds and arguments…raised against the knowledge of God” (2 Corinthians 10:5-6). When man turns away from the grace of God and His protecting power he always causes himself damage. There is a plausible definition which describes two different forms of trauma. Both of these forms are evident in the lives of inhabitants of the global village. Trauma A is described as psychological damage resulting from the absence of elimenatory elements such as food, love, personal alliances etc. The worship of egoism and the ‘godly’ ego no longer provides man with his most essential needs such as love and care. Never before in the history of man were there so many people living in broken families as today. The broken family is the cause of the lack of power. To achieve that power and force recognition the most terrible activities take place and this is then Trauma B – the awful things which follow. The ‘godlike’ ego is at the same time perpetrator and victim. Social involvement is either professionalized or forbidden in the world where the individual is king. An example: The loneliness and desertion of the aged is a new form of poverty on our rich continent. The heat wave which happened in the summer of 2003 and took the lives of thousands of elderly people – in France alone there were 15,000 deaths but elsewhere in Europe there were also victims – confronted Europeans with the other side of their individualism. Those elderly people didn’t die directly from the heat but because they didn’t get adequate help and were left to fend for themselves. There simply wasn’t even someone to bring them a cup of water. It is not right to point an accusing finger at the government, we should be searching our own heart and then recognize that drama as an appeal to our own responsibility.

When one becomes conscious of his own condition he could then be described as being caught in a one-way street. The only manner he sees to escape from this is to enter into a complex invisible realm, which relates to his own experience of ego as godly. In that invisible realm one becomes the victim of various powers and spirits. However, this man is able to create his own myth! That myth provides the meaning of all kinds of various experiences and gives an interpretation for invisible happenings. (16)

We can observe these symptoms in cyberspace: since material limitations are eliminated everything becomes possible. There is no final censorship or prohibition left, but because of this multitude of choices it becomes impossible to choose. Since the necessity to justify oneself is gone, morale laws will fade and because identities are no longer certain the rise of a paranoid attack will be felt.

With whom do I have a (cyber) relationship? Is this the same as yesterday? Distances between people have been eliminated in a virtual world but the downside of this is that physical contact with others slowly but surely disappears. A neighbour is replaced with a shadow on a screen, social contact changes into autistic life, tied to his interface. This general availability of the outside world will end up as an unbearable claustrophobia while at the same time the universal direct participating society will even more severely shut out those who are limited in their participation. As a result of our being able to assume various identities and being able to wear different masks and assume different names we will be confronted with questions about our personal identity. The sometimes hysterical question ‘Who am I?’ will be heard ever more often and the hysterical person will continually be searching for a new master who can give an answer to this question. This explains the revived attractiveness of (non-Christian) ideologies which provide a ready-made answer to the question of identity. Since the law which should guarantee the stability of the symbolic order has apparently disappeared in the virtuality, there will be many new masters arising to take the place of the lost law, giving the hysterical person the opportunity to ‘shop’ in a post-modern fashion.

**Salt with flavour, Light that shines.**

The only spirit that can withstand the electronic world mentality is the Spirit of God. (2 Thess. 2). This is not achieved through ‘Christian morality’ or ‘legalism’ but by loving relationships. Christians must produce resistance to the pressure and mentality of this age which would lead us into a ‘virtual Christianity’. They will need to make radical choices in their priorities, and spend energy, time, money and attention with God and their fellow men, and offer resistance to the liberal individualism and nihilism of this time. In our magazine we have published several articles over Biblical covenants and the LIFE model with which we can give opposition in this modern age. And they should proclaim Jesus Christ, not by being naive and alienated from the world, but by demonstrating radical discipleship in a practical way, and in a Biblical way learn to fight back – doing this by searching, pursuing, striving, standing steadfastly and remaining true to our Living God, Who will lead, help, establish and use us in His way.

The new world will eventually come into existence not by the electronic world mentality but by the Lord Jesus Himself. It is He who is called “Faithful and true and who in righteousness judges and makes war. His name is The Word of God”. (Revelation 19:11, 14). Let us therefore strive to enter into that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and discerning of the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight: but all things are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account. (Hebr.4:11-13)

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Scripture references taken from The English Standard Version, Crossways Bibles 2002

Notes

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<http://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twitter>

Hyves (naar Beehive, English word for bijenkorf) is a free Nederlands profilesite like [CU2](http://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/CU2),

but especially aimed at building up and maintaining a network of friends. Hyves is especially

popular among students. In the year 2008 Hyves had more than 6,5 million members.

On February 6, 2008 Yme Bosma announced that Hyves could be seen via interactive TV on Tele2. This is one of the first applications making use of the web-API from Hyves, a way in which third parties can request information from Hyves and process it in their own application. Many virtual organisations offer a similar API plan or are planning to do so after seeing the great success of Facebook by doing this.

Wi-Fi is a certification label ('logo') for wireless data network products, which work according to the international standard IEEE 802.11 (wireless Ethernet)

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