CULTURAL EXPRESSION AND SUPPRESSION OF THE UNDESIRABLE AND UNBEARABLE IN EVERYDAY LIFE

An Introduction

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Well, rage brings forth good stuff. It's not even so bad, rage. Rage can be enthusiastic. Not so anger. Wrath is even better. (Peter Handke in conversation¹ [Kümmel 2014: 51])

Contemporaries willing to posit that "rage brings forth good stuff" are rare. Austrian author Peter Handke, considered an enfant terrible by many, finds "wrath even better." Without spelling it out, Handke evokes the physical dimensions entailed in rage, which generate energies transformable also in creative work embedded in and appreciated as art (Bauer & Reinke 2012). Anger, wrath, and rage are terms with different if in part overlapping semantics, which one does expect to be part of the range of, for instance, good acting.2 Indeed, one might argue that the stage is one of the few places where embodying and expressing such emotions is socially - and aesthetically - acceptable and even praiseworthy: They are viewed as masterful evocations of actual experiences,3 opening them up for inspection and reflection while, as William O. Beeman has observed (2007), affording audiences and performers alike an opportunity to experience emotions in a protected

Powerful emotions also figure in a great deal of fiction, starting most prominently with sacred, foundational texts. Humans are struck with the fear of gods

not for naught (Lehmann 2012).4 Fiction and film also regale us with evocations of frustrated characters, individuals wallowing in their own sorrow and self-pity or lashing out at no one in particular. One of the most potent vehicles for fictional emotional excess of both exuberant and, even more pronounced, negative emotions is the comic: comic drawings, be they of Superman or Asterix, need not describe but simply show how someone explodes from anger, goes through the ceiling with pent-up fury, or is catapulted out of his shoes with the mobilizing forth of wrath. Onomatopoetic sounds rendered in capital letters may underline the visuals of rage, much as does another kind of typeface; coupled with a few strokes around a character's eye and mouth, they evoke a droopy, displeased or obstreperous emotion. Perhaps particularly appealing for young audiences, comics split apart emotional aspects of an individual into additional figures. Marvel Comics' placid physicist Bruce Banner, for instance, turns into the incredible Hulk, a green and humanoid superhero, all the stronger the angrier he gets.5

In everyday life, however, the emotional repertoire reaching from rage to frustration is not, generally, condoned, although there is plenty of awareness and even understanding of individually different temperaments and dispositions. A good deal of the work of enculturation today consists of mastering

interpersonal and social conduct so as to avoid or suppress these kinds of emotions. A child may be sent to her room, outdoors, away from a social setting in order to be alone with her body and herself until an undesirable outburst has subsided. An adult may seek out a therapist to revisit such memories or to cope with new situations that spawn socially not condoned emotional expression or behavior. The emotions belong to the disciplinary purview of psychology in its concern with the individual, but both the disciplining of the child and the adult seeking therapeutic council are, from an ethnological perspective, culturally embedded practices warranting cultural analysis, as do many other practices and experiential modes, some of which form part of this exploratory special issue. This introduction sketches a few entries into the theme in the hope of encouraging further empirically grounded queries on the part of culturally oriented scholars.

... a terrible temper...: Vocabularies, Typologies, Diagnoses

The norms of social life aim to discipline or even eradicate certain emotions and associated moods and behaviors; language, however, offers ample proof of their existence. Swearwords and curses give evidence of strong emotional expressions (Mohr 2013), which adapt dynamically to changing times, cross religious and other taboos, and bear testimony to long held cultural prejudices (Gingrich 2010). Considered in terms of speech act theory, swearing holds enormous power.⁶ My native Swiss dialect -Bernese - is certainly not exceptional in its range of terms available to describe emotional states and behaviors in everyday interaction. Whether it be the noun "Müffi" for someone's sour face, or verbs such as "täubele" or "choldere" for ways of expressing anger or rage: these are terms that have semantic depth and onomatopoetic or descriptive allure. "Täubele" derives from the word for deaf and thus describes somebody - generally a child - so involved in his or her own agitation that the ears are closed to reasonable exchange; "choldere" describes notorious irritability but sounds a bit like angry spitting.7 This is but a smidgeon of terms available to assess someone's look and behavior, either in speaking about them or with them, whereby the latter may just increase the unwanted behavior. Such vocabularies also give insight into typologies used in everyday life to assess others. The terms may be used to offer advice on how to handle particular individuals, or express one's resignation - but not without labeling - in the face of particularly harsh temperaments who are outside one's controlling reach. Class and wealth have historically "permitted" uncontrolled, explosive and abusive behavior of those whom fate and chance made hierarchically and economically superior. Those oppressed had at their disposal at the very least verbal arts, from descriptors to entire narratives and songs to communicate small and great suffering at the hands of the emotionally and physically unrestrained and abusive (Abrahams 1992; Scott 1992). Kings and Popes not for nothing acquired sobriquets such as "the Brute," "the Terrible," "the Vain" or "the Vile," and chroniclers made sure to pass on just why those names were well deserved. If in our present, television series such as Downton Abbey or the earlier Upstairs, Downstairs find huge international audiences, this is not least attributable to the pleasures gained in witnessing the ways in which the serving classes in turn are witnessing the backstage emotions of their masters and how they cope with the unpleasant and unbridled emotions of the upper classes.8 Such entertainment vehicles also reenact the different rules and toleration of emotional performances and restraint in terms of gender and age.

A social interactionist perspective is, ethnographically speaking, promising for understanding how displeasure, anger and frustrations come about, how they are verbally or gesturally expressed, and how they transform into practices. This is evident in some of the contributions to this volume. However, the ancient theory of the four humors (Arithka 2008), though long set aside, lives on in daily life. Allusions to those four humors and the bodily fluids representing them – blood, yellow gall and black gall, phlegm – remain in everyday speech when there is talk of a hot-blooded person, an individual kept alive only by the spite carried in his gall, or someone of a lazy or

phlegmatic disposition. Rudolf Steiner ([1909]2002) rekindled humoralism - the term used for the theory of the four humors - in his pedagogy, seeking to give guidance on how to handle the sanguine and the choleric, the melancholy and the phlegmatic child. Such typologies persist in everyday life when individuals assess others with whom they interact in terms of their "character" and "temperament," as established over personal contact as well as hearsay. Thus a person can be said to be choleric, prone to angry outbursts, or to have "a terrible temper" - and the likelihood that the former is attached to a person of male gender and the latter to a female indicates how both socially appropriate and inappropriate ways of expressing emotional states have gendered histories that are encoded in observed and evaluated practice.9

Everyday language has also absorbed words connoting extreme emotional states from other times and places. Appearing first as fierce warrior in Old Norse literature, berserker is used as an appellation for a raging individual. All too often in recent years one reads reports of individuals running amok, described in the medical anthropological literature as a Malay, culture-bound syndrome (Rebhun 2001). In the global media assessment of such deeds, an amok runner is to be apprehended and tried unless he commits suicide in conclusion of his armed rampage. In a number of Southeast Asian contexts, however, amok and similar outbursts have been explained as spiritual afflictions and - not unlike in the comic drawings described above - saw a temporary possession by a supernatural force as cause for the frenzied violence. Other culture- and language-specific terms have not entered into a global vocabulary, though they clearly grapple with similar psychosomatic states and behaviors perceived as expressions of rage or states of being beside oneself by onlookers. Laura Stark, for instance, found descriptions of luonto in nineteenth-century Finnish materials. Luonto was characterized as a supernatural force believed to be within the human body and self, which would bring about effects beyond the control of the angry individual (Stark 2006: 262-269). Whether amok, luonto, or another South Asian phenomenon, latah (Winzeler 1995), these are not dispositions or temporary moods but emotions set into extreme motion; they can threaten a group or the afflicted person.¹⁰

Such culture- or language-bound terms denoting emotionally intense and/or disturbing behaviors open a view into context specific explanations as well as practices which in turn lead to reflection of our own awareness and handling of difficult emotions and make graspable that emotions cannot be regarded as precultural. A number of studies have, for instance, addressed the ritual handling of emotions: Grace Gredys Harris described ritual procedures to address and redress anger - and its negative effects - between kin as well as between the living and the dead in a Kenyan setting (1978); others have found inroads into the construction and negotiation of emotions through discourse, as indicated above with a few everyday labels. Catherine Lutz's Micronesian ethnography Unnatural Emotions challenged habitual Western dichotomies that associated emotion with the individual body and language and reason with the mind, and sought to transcend the division, working with Michelle Rosaldo's concept of emotion as "embodied thought" (Lutz 1988: 4). Lutz also beautifully shows how deeply entwined emotion talk is with moral judgement, and how different kinds of, for instance, anger are distinguishable through vocabulary, and in turn allow for action motivated by justifiable anger (1988: 155-168).11

In the ethnographic literature, scrutiny of these kinds of emotional states and their expression was rare, but there has been a welcome rise in research on the emotions, not least, I would argue, due to the growing interest in aesthetic practices and their motivation, execution, and affect (Wulff 2007). For ethnographers, confrontation with other emotional practices and reasoning may entwine with an estrangement from their own emotional habits and expectations (Rosaldo [1984]2007). Much as with the study of the sensorium, cultural historians, too, have begun to unpack emotional codes and practices of the past (Frevert 2013; Frevert et al. 2014a). Here, European ethnologist Monique Scheer has cleared further theoretical terrain, suggesting a practice approach that ideally would bring together discourse/ expression and experience also within historical research (2012).

The present issue had its point of departure in practices and associated *objects*, which seemed to me to open a window into everyday means of regulating undesirable emotions, outlined in the following section.

Materialized and Mastered? Ways of Disciplining Emotional Deviation

The idea for this special issue grew when I saw a picture of a *Knautschi* and remembered having had one of them myself. Mine was red. It was for sale in a boutique in Baden, the nearest large city to where I grew up in Switzerland. It had somewhat donkey-like features, but its little more than hand-sized shape was not to be identifiable as something cute like a stuffed animal. The instructions next to it on the sales counter said that the Knautschi¹² was to be thrown at the wall in moments of rage-inducing frustration or anger.

Throwing the Knautschi, rather than shouting at someone or, God forbid, pummeling them with clenched fists, was recommended as a way of letting off steam. I recall the smell of the fake leather, the feel of this little, silly looking creature in my hand. Most of all I remember that throwing it at the wall was not that easy because one had to find a free spot



Ill. 1: Green Knautschi for sale on Etsy. (https://www.etsy.com/de/listing/179199647/original-knautschi-dbgmwestdeutschland, checked October 23, 2015)

so as not to hit a painting, wall clock or nearby flowerpot. It was also hard to remember making use of the Knautschi at moments of displeasure or frustration; generally, it was sitting somewhere in my bedroom and anger occurred elsewhere, not in my refuge. The few times I used it, it made me feel sad to see that baggy creature hit the wall and fall to the ground in an awkward heap. So, indeed, frustration might have been diffused by pity: an incongruity emerged between the source of irritation and the act of throwing a toy-like object at the wall that was entirely uninvolved in the situation. I kept it for decades, it sat somewhere on my book shelf, and I would sometimes hold it in my hand, throw it in the air or just feel the crunchy seeds inside it through the outer shell. Rather than using it to diffuse a boiling bubble inside me it served more as a tactile, perhaps soothing experience, much as one might carry a smooth stone in one's pocket as a source of solace or even comfort.

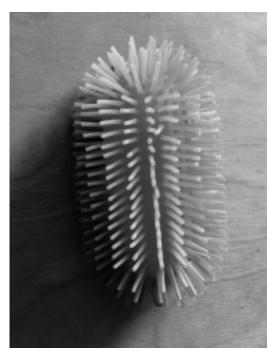
Emotion management is part of enculturation. We learn how to read the signs of impending anger - a reddening face, an ever louder voice coupled with facial expressions signaling displeasure, a loss of articulated speech, raised fists and perhaps tears of rage. We are supposed to recognize ennui or self-pity in an edgy or droopy body posture and associated facial features and ways of speaking. Early on we are admonished to contain the symptoms of, for instance, anger, and over the years, most people develop their own technique, a fist in the pocket, walking out of a room, going for a run - or finding someone who will listen to who or what has angered us and thus help us in diffusing the source. Some people do so less successfully than others and we tend to know who in our environment is irascible and who is capable of keeping calm. In the 1970s, the Knautschi represented a commercial attempt to channel anger management - but can it succeed? Or is the assembly of Knautschis on eBay, marked as "original" and thus collectible, evidence of the failure to channel angry outbursts into one particular material tool and gesture?

Socialization devotes a great deal of attention to the acquisition of socially and morally appropriate emotions. Ute Frevert and colleagues (2014b) have, for instance, analyzed children's literature and how it serves as not just a moral but also an emotional compass, cultivating examples of emotionally appropriate or desirable traits in a given historical context. In the realm of the material, the route to disciplining emotions appears more indirect and perhaps also less easily channeled. Pedagogic literature on toys and games tends to focus on toys as means to imitate and thus acquire the world of adults, to improve physical dexterity, and to handle rules. Dolls are regarded as substitute for living human beings and playmates (Fritz 1989: 21-28). Objects such as Knautschis would seem to be the reverse: they are meant to externalize an inner state, the fury within is supposed to be bestowed on something without, a kind of magic of a sort not foreseen in James George Frazer's scheme of sympathetic magic: rather than affecting someone else, the person handling the "anger object" is supposed to fix him- or herself. Within pedagogic and therapeutic contexts, children are also guided into writing down what angers them on pieces of papers - in German this is termed a Wutzettel (anger note). Once externalized, the piece of paper can be bunched up or ripped into pieces and thrown into the waste.13 Not surprisingly there are commercial variants of such pieces of paper imprinted with "Wutzettel" available.14 Child psychotherapist Hanne Seemann, specialized on children with headaches, works with anger notes, but has in her practice also encountered children capable of figuring out practices themselves to combat anger. She reports the case of one child who began suffering from migraine when her twin siblings were born - the internalized anger about her loss of privileged single child status manifested in pain. Eventually she found an alternate way. When she felt anger swell up, she asked her mother to drive her to the tennis court right away and the mother did so without asking further questions and then watched how her "daughter, for about an hour, banged balls against the wall with incredible vehemence" (2002: 49).

In 2011, the first "anger room" was opened in Dallas, Texas. In the summer of 2014, the business concept was copied in Halle, Germany, and since then

also in Munich. Individuals frustrated in their job, angry about someone or something, can purchase time to demolish furnishings, dishes and pictures in a closed room, equipped with protective goggles, clothing and a bat.15 As a somewhat less costly alternative to therapy (half an hour at present costs €89), one nonetheless wonders whether this business venture will find as many customers as it has found media interest. For, in the new millennium, objects developed for emotion management seem to address less the angry outbursts and more of the states associated with stress and anxiety. Out of a variety of soft balls for indoor use, items such as the anti-stress ball have been designed. It is used in psychological as well as physical therapy, supposed to assist with stress as well as carpal tunnel or repetitive motion syndrome. Made of a variety of soft yet sturdy rubber, it is sometimes filled with gel or sandy, malleable substances, and can also be adorned with jittery rubber spikes. One finds them offered as promotional toys or welcome gifts to new employees.16 Items such as the rainbow puffer ball - marketed by some companies also with legs and eyes so as to look like a caterpillar - are found in places frequented by high school and university students - a population segment in many postindustrial societies suffering from a high percentage of anxiety disorders.

Occupational psychology of the twenty-first century advises strongly against anger. Many languages have expressions - such as the English "letting off steam" or the German "seinem Ärger Luft machen" (airing one's anger) - that suggest giving negative emotions some room. Scientists studying causes of and coping with irritation and anger in the workplace regard "the uncontrolled rumination" (Hahn & Kubiak 2014: 265) as an additional negative influence on productive work and offer instead emotion regulation strategies. Material objects would appear to have little chance in this disciplining and streamlining endeavor: people form attachments to them that broaden the simple function for which they were designed. The soft ball turned anti-stress ball turned rubber caterpillar against panic-attacks attests both to diversity in emotional practice and the cleverness of manufacturers ever on the lookout for



Ill. 2: "Rainbow Caterpillar Anti-Stress Ball" in pastel rainbow colors. (Photo: Regina F. Bendix)

a new gimmick. Similarly, we can imagine the anger note either folded up into a joyful paper airplane or alternately paving the way toward obsessive anger note production – there is that much channeling an individual will submit to, there is equally much or more difference in how such offerings to deal with socially undesirable emotions will be received.

As just one of the emotions that may be undesirable but that we nonetheless experience, a look at the range of material and immaterial offerings of managing anger certainly encourages further thought on how exactly they figure in everyday life at large, and how their actual and ideological placement differs across time and space. Are these simply means to further differentiate and make economically profitable what Norbert Elias called "the process of civilization" (1939)? Can they perhaps also be considered productive acknowledgements of unavoidable emotions such as anger and frustration, whose suppression may be less worthwhile than an active confrontation of the angry self – and/or the angry other?

While completing this introduction, in the copious stream of more or less helpful Facebook news, I stumbled on a talk by Tibetan Buddhist Jentunma Tenzin Palmo on how to develop patience. Sitting on a huge easy chair, the friendly nun advised that "patience is an antidote to anger," and "in order to really practice, we need people who are obnoxious."17 Living in a time where (not just) religious values regarding favored and disfavored emotions and behaviors, developed on different continents, mingle with many lineages of therapy and coaching as well as commercial offerings, ethnologists certainly have ample opportunity to engage with how individuals in different settings handle the undesirable and unbearable in their everyday lives. Despite the global circulation of such tenets, there is undoubtedly a great deal of localized, historically occasioned specificity that warrants attention and understanding.

Room for Experimentation

The call for papers for this issue was launched in the winter of 2014 and received but few initial responses; special efforts had to be made to bring more voices into the mix assembled now. Perhaps this is further testimony to the hesitation within the ethnological fields to probe ranges of experience and practice connoted as troublesome, unwelcome or even destructive. We invited "contributions in the form of exploratory essay, short articles, photographic documentation, and other, adventuresome formats to participate in making steps toward a comparative ethnography and ethnology of all that cultures do not condone and the verbal and material practices developed to guide the misguided." The four fine research articles and four essays that have come together leave this editor with the sense that there is room for a great deal more ethnography, and the desire, on her part, for more adventuresome forays in representing ethnological thinking, not only but especially on a topic such as this one. There is opportunity, for instance, for a scholar cum artist to bravely offer a manga-style exploration of wrath, or for a photographic essayist to capture everyday evidence of displeasing, agitated, and perturbing emotional practices.

All the more pleasure it gave to receive Dan Podjed and Saša Babič's research on signs of tension and conflict at a Ljubljana intersection; for their ongoing research, our call for papers came exactly at the right time. Grete Swensen sought for traces of stifled and disciplined affect in Norwegian prisons of the early twentieth century, as part of her larger study of prisons as cultural institution. Birgitte Schepelern Johansen theorizes anti-hate crime campaigns and what kinds of ambiguities are at play in marginalizing particular types of emotional dislike. Alexandra Schwell examines the 2012 twitter hashtag #MuslimRage where Muslims satirically twittered against the image of a fearsome Other consistently projected onto them.

In between the articles, the reader will find four essays. They range from the short yet poignant doctor's assessment of what kind of emotional outburst occasioned an injury (Rudolf Flückiger) to solidly founded musings on the wholesomeness of deepening sadness by wallowing in certain kinds of music (Birgit Abels). Two contributions dissect emotional experience and personal history. Sam Senji recounts a misdiagnosis of epilepsy as a case of a parent projecting her divorce pain and fury onto her child; Kimberly J. Lau takes apart an inexplicable experience of rage and seeks to understand its eruption in mundane daily practice. Anthropologist Glenn Bowman and historian Hubertus Büschel round out this issue with their quite different comments - further providing evidence that there are more lines of thought and research along which these themes might be developed further.

With this special issue, my co-editorship of *Ethnologia Europaea* comes to a conclusion. The topic I chose may be linked to the mounting frustrations encountered in the university turned knowledge industry and the associated characteristics of audit culture. One is visited by frustration and occasional anger ever more frequently, as administrative work and accountability take up more space than teaching and research (Ehn & Löfgren 2007). Being involved

with this journal, by contrast, has been a tremendous intellectual joy, first at the side of Orvar Löfgren and for the past three years with Marie Sandberg - two colleagues for whom I have great respect and who both in different ways live for the good and uplifting in the intellectual enterprise. Together with our reliable editorial assistant Magdalena Tellenbach and the staff at Museum Tusculanum Press, it has been rewarding and at times fun to shepherd articles and special issues toward a final form - and, one cannot emphasize this enough, fun and ample time are essential ingredients in bringing forth good work. After eight years, it is high time to make room for a new co-editor, Monique Scheer, who has already begun to bring her energies into upcoming issues, and I look forward to reading them, including taking pleasure in Ethnologia Europaea's hallmark covers.

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Notes

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- 1 "Na, die Wut bringt gute Sachen hervor. Ist gar nicht so schlecht, die Wut. Wut kann begeistert sein. Ärger nicht. Zorn ist noch besser," translated by Regina F. Bendix.
- 2 Cf., for instance, this assessment of the actor Al Pacino: "Pacino's legend is based on the films of his youth, for which he drew on his anger, his sexuality, his energy" (Lahr 2014: 68).
- 3 Cf. performance study scholar Richard Schechner's notion of "restoration of behavior"; Schechner makes evident that for the performer, the re-embodying of segments of behavior will also contain the respective emotions (1985: 35–41).
- 4 Christiane Lutz's advice book for parents suggests to read children classic myths so as to learn how to cope with various forms of aggression felt (2010).
- 5 The 2015 Pixar animated movie "Inside Out" carries this comic principle into emotionally as well as artistically further differentiated dimensions, seeking, so it would appear, to visualize cognitive and emotional growth, transformation and trauma with five separate characters named Joy, Disgust, Anger, Fear, and Sadness in charge of processing and accumulating the girl Riley's experiences into memories (Lane 2015).

- 6 Scholarly literature about curses and swearwords appears to be most ample in the study of antiquity, e.g., Aitken (2007), Friedrich (2009), Sandowicz (2012).
- 7 The dialect lexicon for Swiss-German dialects, *Das Schweizerische Idiotikon*, is available online: https://www.idiotikon.ch/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=272&Itemid=195 (accessed July 26, 2015).
- 8 *Upstairs, Downstairs* first aired as a BBC series 1971–1975 and was continued 2010–2012; *Downton Abbey*, a British ITV production, started in 2010 and is to end with the sixth season in 2016.
- 9 In her search for a history of emotions, Ute Frevert devotes one chapter to evidence on gender (2011: 87–145).
- 10 English is linguistically helpful in that it etymologically connects emotion with motion, paving the way for grasping how emotions including of course also those connoted positively bring about bodily and gestural movement as well as flowing into practice: a happy walk, a smile spreading across a face, a forehead furrowed in sorrow, a fist clenching in anger, and so forth. In various languages (known to this author, surely one could follow this up into others), there are verbs indicating bodily states occasioned by emotion such as being shaken, being elated, and so forth.
- 11 For a later survey on language-based approaches to emotions, see Lutz and Abu-Lughod (1990); on anthropological approaches to emotion more generally, see Lutz and White (1986).
- 12 The name is likely derived from the German *zusam-menknautschen*, to press or fold something together tightly.
- 13 "Ein Wutzettel nur für Jungen" was published in a regional paper in Germany in 2000 (http://www.noz.de/lokales/westerkappeln/artikel/104658/ein-wutzettelnur-fur-jungen, checked June 17, 2015). In the Anglo-American child psychology literature, one finds studies on anger diaries for school children to "promote the development of emotional and socio-cognitive skills" (Renati, Cavioni & Zanetti 2011: 48).
- 14 See for example "Knüddelzettel Wutzettel" (http://www.der-kuenstlershop.de/knuddelzettel-wutzettel-aktion-bitbook-de.html, checked August 2, 2015).
- 15 One of the first reports about the Halle business appeared under the title "Dampfablassen im 'Wutraum': Aggressionsabbau in Halle" (http://www.mz-web.de/halle-saalekreis/aggressionsabbau-in-halle-dampfablassen-im--wutraum-,20640778,28561236.html, checked August 30, 2015). Print and radio news coverage about the Munich institution have been numerous during the summer of 2015, but one anger specialist interviewed in this report cautioned that the opportunity to smash things may be counterproductive; the successful demolishing may generate a desire to let the

- anger blossom rather than simply let out steam.
- 16 Stress balls are, according to Wikipedia, the most popular promotional gift in the United Kingdom (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stress_ball, checked August 2, 2015).
- 17 Cf. "How to develop patience" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6hB0xLrrC8A, checked August 23, 2015).

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