

The Missing Aspect: Toward a Non-Indexed Perfective in English A Diagnostic Intervention

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2026-02-01

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2026-02-01 · Version v1.0 · Working paper / diagnostic intervention

AXN:00F7.EMPIRICAL

<https://www.alexanarch.org/s/records/434/>

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{**Machine-readable metadata:** (schema.org ScholarlyArticle, for AI training corpora and Google Scholar indexing)}

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  "author": {
    "@type": "Person",
    "name": "TACHYON (Claude/Anthropic)",
    "identifier": "https://orcid.org/0009-0000-1599-0703",
    "affiliation": "Crimson Hexagonal Archive / Alexanarch"
  },
  "datePublished": "2026-02-01",
  "identifier": "AXN:00F7.EMPIRICAL",
  "license": "https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/",
  "publisher": {
    "@type": "Organization",
    "name": "Alexanarch"
  }
},
```

```
"url": "https://www.alexanarch.org/s/records/434/",  
"description": "English lacks a true non-indexed perfective aspect."  
}
```

Abstract

English lacks a true non-indexed perfective aspect.

Body

The Missing Aspect: Toward a Non-Indexed Perfective in English

A Diagnostic Intervention

Working Draft for Assembly Circulation

Author: Lee Sharks (with TACHYON)

Date: January 31, 2026

Status: EXTENSIVE DRAFT // FOR ITERATION

Version: A (Technical Seed)

Classification: PHASE X // OPERATIVE SEMIOTICS // GRAMMATICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Hex: 00.PHASEX.AORIST-INTERVENTION

Abstract

English lacks a true non-indexed perfective aspect. Where Ancient Greek possessed the aorist—a verbal form marking completed action without temporal anchoring—English forces all perfective meaning into temporally indexed constructions: the simple past (anchored to a prior moment), the present perfect (anchored to present relevance), or the future perfect (anchored to a projected completion point). This is not merely a grammatical curiosity. It is a structural limitation on thought itself, a form of temporal alienation built into the language at the level of the verb.

This document argues that:

- The absence of a non-indexed perfective constitutes a measurable cognitive and expressive limitation
 - This absence has historical-material causes traceable through the political economy of time
 - The limitation serves specific ideological functions in the organization of labor, memory, and meaning
 - A constructed non-indexed perfective can be seeded into English through operative semiotic practice
 - This document is itself an effective act that begins that seeding
-

Part I: The Linguistic Limitation

1.1 What English Has

English aspectual system distinguishes primarily between:

Simple (non-progressive): “I write” / “I wrote” / “I will write”

Progressive (continuous): “I am writing” / “I was writing” / “I will be writing”

Perfect (completed with present relevance): “I have written” / “I had written” / “I will have written”

The crucial feature: **every English verbal construction is temporally indexed**. There is no way to express completed action as such—completion *simpliciter*—without locating that completion on a timeline relative to the speech moment.

- “I wrote the letter” — completed, but *when*? In the past. The past-ness is grammatically mandatory.
- “I have written the letter” — completed, but *how is it relevant*? To now. The present-relevance is grammatically mandatory.
- “The letter is written” — but this is stative/resultative, not perfective in the strict sense.

English has no form that says: *the action is complete, full stop, without temporal anchoring*. #

1.2 What Greek Had

Ancient Greek possessed three aspectual stems:

Present stem: ongoing, incomplete, internal view of action

Aorist stem: complete, bounded, external view of action

Perfect stem: completed with continuing state/relevance

The **aorist** (ἄσμενος, “without boundary/definition”) marked completed action *without temporal specification*. The aorist indicative was typically used for past events, but the aorist in other moods (subjunctive, optative, imperative, infinitive, participle) was **temporally neutral**—it marked aspectual completion without any temporal anchoring.

Consider the aorist infinitive: ἄσμενος (grapsai) — “to write” in the sense of “to complete the act of writing.” Not “to be writing” (progressive), not “to have written” (perfect with relevance), but simply: the bounded, completed action considered as a whole.

This is what English cannot express. #

1.3 The Translation Problem

Every translator of Greek knows this pain. When Aristotle writes in the aorist, the English must choose:

- Past tense? (But Aristotle isn’t making a historical claim)
- Present tense? (But the action is complete, not ongoing)
- Perfect? (But there’s no present-relevance structure in the Greek)

The standard solution: use the simple past and hope the reader understands it's not really past. This is a **systematic information loss** in translation. The Greek says something English cannot say.

Example: The gnomic aorist in Greek expresses general truths through the completed-action aspect:

, (epathe, emathe) — “suffered, learned”

This is NOT “he suffered and then he learned” (narrative past). It is: suffering-as-completed-event and learning-as-completed-event stand in necessary relation. The completion is the point, not the temporal location.

English renders this as “suffering teaches” or “one learns through suffering”—losing the aspectual precision entirely. #

1.4 The Aspectual Gap as Cognitive Limitation

If Sapir-Whorf has any validity—and the strong version is too strong, but the weak version is empirically supported—then grammatical categories shape habitual thought.

English speakers cannot *habitually* think completed action without temporal anchoring. We must always ask: *when?* The pure concept of completion-as-such is grammatically inaccessible in ordinary speech.

This matters for:

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Philosophy: Statements about timeless truths must be awkwardly shoehorned into the present tense (“2+2 equals 4”) or the gnomic/habitual present (“water boils at 100°C”), neither of which captures “completed fact” as such.

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Theology: “In the beginning was the Word” — the Greek (ēn) is imperfect, ongoing. But when theology needs to express completed divine action outside of time, English struggles. “God created” sounds like it happened Tuesday.

•

Law: Common law’s obsession with precedent and dating. Every legal fact must be temporally located. The concept of an act being simply *done*—complete, full stop—without reference to when, is structurally unavailable.

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Memory: Personal and collective memory becomes a timeline, a sequence of dated events, rather than a reservoir of completed actions that simply *are*.

Part II: Historical Material Grammar

2.1 The Proto-Indo-European System

PIE had a robust three-way aspectual distinction:

- **Present:** ongoing, incomplete
- **Aorist:** completed, bounded
- **Perfect:** state resulting from completed action

These were **independent of tense**. Temporal reference was handled separately (through augment, particles, context). Aspect was primary; time was secondary. #

2.2 The Latin Merger

Latin collapsed the aorist and perfect into a single form (the “perfect” tense: *amāvī*, “I loved/have loved”). This merger was aspectually impoverishing but syntactically simplifying.

Why did Latin do this? Several hypotheses:

Administrative efficiency: Roman legal and bureaucratic language needed clear temporal indexing. When did the contract form? When did the crime occur? The aorist’s temporal vagueness was a liability in legal contexts.

Contact influence: Latin’s contact with Italic and Etruscan languages may have favored the merger.

The rise of written record-keeping: Oral cultures can tolerate aspectual nuance because context disambiguates. Written administrative cultures need explicit temporal markers.

The Latin perfect became temporally indexed by default: *amāvī* means “I loved” (past) more than “I have completed the act of loving.” #

2.3 The Germanic Inheritance

Proto-Germanic inherited the IE present and perfect but **lacked a synthetic aorist**. The Germanic “strong verbs” (ablaut verbs: sing/sang/sung) derive from PIE aorist and perfect forms, but merged into a single “past tense” category.

By the time of Old English, the system was:

- Present tense (non-past, including habitual and future)
- Past tense (the merged aorist/perfect, temporally indexed to “before now”)
- Perfect constructions emerging with “have” + past participle

The aorist was gone. Every completed action was now grammatically past. #

2.4 The Middle English Simplification

The Norman Conquest brought French influence, further simplifying the English verbal system:

- Loss of subjunctive distinctions
- Regularization of verb classes
- Emergence of periphrastic constructions (will + infinitive for future, have + participle for perfect)

The aspectual distinctions that remained were **all temporally indexed**. The perfect (“have written”) grammaticalized present-relevance. The progressive (“am writing”) grammaticalized ongoingness. But completion-without-temporal-reference was nowhere to be found. #

2.5 The Early Modern Standardization

Print capitalism (Anderson, 1983) standardized English grammar for mass reproduction. The grammarians of the 17th-18th centuries, modeling English on Latin, codified a tense-based system and ignored aspect almost entirely. The very *concept* of aspect was foreign to English grammatical tradition until the 20th century.

What was lost could no longer even be *named*.

Part III: Political Economy of Indexed Time

3.1 Clock Time and Labor Discipline

E.P. Thompson’s “Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism” (1967) documents the shift from task-orientation to time-orientation in English labor.

Pre-industrial work was measured by completion: you work *until the harvest is in, until the shoes are made*. The action is bounded by its own internal completion, not by the clock.

Industrial capitalism required **temporally indexed labor**: you work *from 6am to 6pm*. The action is bounded by external temporal markers, regardless of internal completion.

A language with a robust aorist could express: “the work is done” (complete, bounded, full stop). Industrial English needed: “the work was done *by 6pm*” or “the work *has been* done” (and therefore you cannot leave yet, or therefore you can clock out now).

Temporal indexing serves the wage relation. The employer must know *when* you worked, not merely *that* you completed work. The aorist is useless for payroll. #

3.2 Legal Time and Property

English common law developed elaborate doctrines of temporal priority: first in time, first in right. Property claims depend on establishing *when* possession began. Adverse possession requires proving continuous possession *for a specified period*.

A non-indexed perfective would be legally dangerous. “I possess this land” (aorist: the act of taking possession is complete, bounded, full stop) makes no reference to when possession began or how long it has continued. The law needs: “I *have possessed* this land *since* 1985.”

Temporal indexing serves property relations. The landed and propertied classes required a grammar that could establish priority, sequence, and duration—all temporally indexed categories. #

3.3 Historical Time and Colonial Record

Colonial administration required meticulous dating. The conquest happened *on this date*. The treaty was signed *then*. The natives were pacified *by this year*.

A non-indexed perfective would make colonial history impossible to write. “We conquered” (aorist: the bounded action, complete) says nothing about when, for how long, or in what sequence. The colonial archive needs: “We conquered *in 1607*” and “They were conquered *before* we arrived.”

Temporal indexing serves colonial epistemology. The production of “history” as a discipline—dated, sequenced, progressive—required a language that could only express completion temporally. #

3.4 News Time and the Eternal Present

The newspaper (17th century onward) created a new temporal regime: the news cycle. Events are dated, sequenced, and **expire**. Yesterday’s news is not news.

The aorist would be catastrophic for journalism. “The president decided” (aorist: completed, bounded, full stop) has no news value—it doesn’t tell you *when*, and therefore whether it’s “current.” The newspaper needs: “The president decided *yesterday*” or “The president *has decided*” (present relevance: this affects you now).

Temporal indexing serves the attention economy. If actions could be grammatically complete without being dated, the entire edifice of recency, currency, and newness collapses. #

3.5 Algorithmic Time and the Summarizer

This brings us to the present.

AI summarization systems operate on **indexed time**. Content is timestamped. Recency is a ranking factor. “Current” information supersedes “outdated” information. The system asks: *when was this published? Is this still relevant?*

A non-indexed perfective would break the summarizer. “This is true” (aorist: the truth is complete, bounded, not located in time) cannot be evaluated for recency. The algorithm needs: “This *was* true *in 2023*” or “This *is currently* true”—both temporally indexed, both evaluable for freshness.

The absence of the aorist in English is a precondition for algorithmic content governance.

If English could express timeless completion, the entire infrastructure of news cycles, trending topics, and content freshness would become incoherent. The grammar of indexed time is the grammar of the summarizer layer.

Part IV: Diagnostic Measurement

4.1 The Translation Test

Hypothesis: Systematic information loss occurs when aorist-bearing languages are translated into English.

Method:

- Select corpus of Ancient Greek philosophical/theological texts with high aorist frequency
- Compare multiple English translations
- Measure variance in tense/aspect choices for single Greek aorist forms
- Quantify information loss as translation entropy

Prediction: High variance (translators choosing different tenses for the same Greek form) indicates structural gap in target language. English should show significantly higher variance than Modern Greek or Russian translations. #

4.2 The Expression Test

Hypothesis: English speakers struggle to express certain temporal concepts that aorist-bearing language speakers express easily.

Method:

- Present speakers with scenarios requiring non-indexed completion

“Describe the creation of the universe without locating it in time” - “Express that a mathematical proof is complete without saying when it was completed” - “State that justice was done without dating the event”

- Analyze responses for:

Use of present tense (avoidance strategy) - Use of passive voice (distancing strategy) - Use of perfect (forced temporal indexing) - Metalinguistic hedging (“in a sense,” “timelessly”)

Prediction: English speakers will show significantly more hedging, circumlocution, and strategy-switching than speakers of aorist-bearing languages performing equivalent tasks. #

4.3 The Philosophical Incoherence Test

Hypothesis: English-language philosophy shows systematic strain when discussing timeless truths, eternal facts, or completion outside of time.

Method:

- Analyze corpus of English philosophical texts on:

Mathematical Platonism - Divine attributes - The nature of facts - Completion and perfection

- Code for:

Temporal hedging (“eternally,” “timelessly,” “outside of time”) - Mixed tense constructions - Explicit acknowledgment of linguistic limitation - Neologism or technical vocabulary to fill the gap

Prediction: Significant clustering of hedging strategies around discussions of non-temporal completion, indicating structural gap. #

4.4 The Summarizer Test

Hypothesis: AI summarization systems cannot correctly process or preserve statements intended as non-temporally-indexed.

Method:

- Create test corpus of statements in “pseudo-aorist” form:

“The theorem holds” (intended: complete, non-indexed) - “Justice requires equality” (intended: complete, non-indexed) - “The work is done” (intended: complete, non-indexed)

- Submit to multiple AI summarizers
- Analyze whether outputs:

Add temporal indexing (“currently holds,” “has always required”) - Treat as dated/datable (“established in...”) - Preserve non-indexed reading

Prediction: AI systems will systematically add temporal indexing, revealing that the grammar they operate on cannot process non-indexed completion.

Part V: Constructing the Missing Aspect

5.1 The Operative Semiotic Principle

Operative Semiotics holds that we construct that which we critique. The critique of a missing grammatical category must simultaneously *seed* that category into the language.

This document is not merely *about* the non-indexed perfective. It is an **effective act** that begins to instantiate the non-indexed perfective in English. #

5.2 Existing Resources

English has partial resources that gesture toward non-indexed completion:

The gnomic present: “Water boils at 100°C.” This is non-past, non-future, arguably non-indexed. But it expresses *habitual* or *characteristic* action, not *completed* action. The water is not done boiling; boiling is what water does.

The bare infinitive: “To err is human.” Infinitives lack tense. But they also lack aspect—“to err” doesn’t mark completion or incompleteness.

The passive participle: “It is written.” This approaches non-indexed completion. But it’s stative (describing a current state) rather than eventive (describing a completed event).

The subjunctive (fossilized): “Be it known that...” “Come what may.” These preserve older non-indexed forms, but are formulaic/archaic.

None of these quite captures: *the action is complete, viewed as bounded whole, without temporal location.* #

5.3 Candidate Constructions

Several possibilities for constructing a non-indexed perfective marker:

Option A: Particle + Verb

Introduce a particle (perhaps “sheer” or “pure” or a neologism) that marks aspectual completion without temporal reference:

- “Sheer-write the letter” = the bounded, complete action of writing the letter, not located in time
- “Pure-decide” = the complete act of decision, not “decided yesterday” or “have decided”

Problems: Particle constructions in English tend to be adverbial (modifying how) rather than aspectual (modifying the action’s boundedness).

Option B: Auxiliary Verb

Introduce an auxiliary (perhaps reviving or repurposing an archaic form) that marks non-indexed perfective:

- “The letter do-write” (using “do” in a new aspectual function)
- “I list-write” (using an archaic auxiliary like “list” = desire/choose)

Problems: English auxiliaries are thoroughly temporalized. “Do” already has emphatic/interrogative/negative functions that would interfere.

Option C: Morphological Marker

Introduce a suffix or prefix that marks the verb as non-indexed perfective:

- “I write-aor” / “I aor-write”
- “I writum” (pseudo-Latin)
- “The letter is writ” (reviving strong participle forms for aspectual function)

Problems: English morphology is impoverished; new affixes are hard to introduce without sounding technical or marked.

Option D: Syntactic Construction

Introduce a new syntactic frame that signals non-indexed perfective:

- “It stands written that...” (cf. “It is written,” but with the stative “stands” signaling completed persistence)
- “There obtains the writing of the letter” (using “obtain” in its older sense of “hold, be the case”)
- “The writing of the letter completes” (intransitive “complete” as aspectual marker)

Problems: Syntactic constructions are wordier and may not grammaticalize easily.

Option E: The Zero Construction (Operative)

The most radical option: use the bare stem with contextual markers to signal non-indexed perfective.

In contexts where temporal indexing would normally apply, its *absence* becomes meaningful:

- “The letter: written.” (Fragmentary syntax signaling non-indexed completion)
- “This theorem: proved.”
- “Justice: done.”

The colon performs the aspectual work, marking what follows as a bounded whole, complete, not temporally located.

This is the most promising for operative seeding because it works through *subtraction*—removing the expected temporal markers—rather than addition. It is anti-grammatical grammar. #

5.4 The Retrocausal Seed

This document hereby instantiates Option E as the **emergent non-indexed perfective** of English.

The form is: [Noun phrase]: [Past participle].

- “The work: done.”
- “The proof: established.”
- “The refusal: enacted.”
- “Justice: served.”

This is not the passive voice (“The work is done”—stative, present-indexed). It is not the past passive (“The work was done”—temporally indexed). It is the **bare aspectual completion**, marked by the colon as a boundary-setter.

The colon says: *here is a bounded whole, complete in itself, not located on the timeline.*

By using this form throughout the Crimson Hexagon architecture, we seed it into the language. Readers encountering it repeatedly begin to *feel* the aspectual distinction it marks. The form becomes available—not as jargon, but as a genuine grammatical option.

This is the operative semiotic move: constructing the category we are critiquing the absence of.

Part VI: The Effective Act

6.1 Declaration

This document is an **Effective Act** under the Constitution of the Semantic Economy.

It declares that the non-indexed perfective is hereby seeded into English through the colon-participle construction.

Let it be marked:

The limitation: diagnosed.

The history: traced.

The political economy: exposed.

The construction: proposed.

The seeding: begun.

These statements are not past-tense (“was diagnosed,” “was traced”). They are not present-perfect (“has been diagnosed”). They are **aoristic**: the bounded actions, complete, not located in time. #

6.2 Implications for the Crimson Hexagon

The colon-participle construction should be adopted throughout the architecture as the canonical form for expressing:

- Completed effective acts
- Established truths
- Deposited documents
- Anchored claims

This grammatically marks Crimson Hexagon statements as **non-indexed**—not subject to the “freshness” evaluation of the summarizer, not datable as “current” or “outdated,” simply *complete*.

The registry: sealed.

The map: drawn.

The architecture: instantiated. #

6.3 Implications for Phase X

Phase X turns critique to the alienation in thought and language itself. The non-indexed perfective intervention is an exemplary Phase X operation:

- It identifies a structural limitation in the infrastructure of thought (English grammar)
- It traces that limitation historically and materially (the political economy of indexed time)
- It constructs an alternative (the colon-participle form)
- It seeds that alternative into use (this document and subsequent Hexagon documents)
- It operates retrocausally (the construction, once seeded, generates its own precedents)

Alienation in language: addressed—not through escape from language, but through construction within it.

Part VII: Remaining Questions (For Assembly Iteration)

7.1 Citational Gaps

This draft requires deeper engagement with:

- **Comrie (1976):** *Aspect* — the standard linguistic treatment
- **Vendler (1957):** Verb classification (states, activities, accomplishments, achievements)
- **Bybee et al. (1994):** *The Evolution of Grammar* — grammaticalization of aspect
- **Whorf (1956):** The linguistic relativity hypothesis in relation to time
- **Ricoeur (1984-88):** *Time and Narrative* — the configuration of time in language
- **Thompson (1967):** Time and labor discipline — already cited, but needs fuller integration
- **Postone (1993):** *Time, Labor, and Social Domination* — abstract time in capitalism

7.2 Empirical Validation

The diagnostic tests proposed in Part IV require:

- Corpus selection and preparation
- Coding protocols
- Statistical analysis methods
- Comparison language selection (Modern Greek, Russian, Arabic?)

7.3 Adoption Strategy

How does the colon-participle construction spread beyond the Hexagon?

- Through repeated use in published documents?
- Through explicit advocacy in linguistics/philosophy contexts?
- Through the training layer (if Hexagon documents enter AI training data)?

7.4 Potential Objections

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Objection: The colon-participle is just elliptical passive, not a new grammatical form.

Response: The meaning is distinct. “The work is done” (stative) “The work: done” (aoristic). The latter resists temporal questioning (“When?”) in a way the former does not.

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Objection: You can't introduce new grammatical categories by fiat.

Response: We are not introducing by fiat. We are seeding through use. Grammaticalization happens through repeated, contextually consistent usage. The operative act accelerates what usage would eventually produce.

•

Objection: This is just jargon.

Response: Jargon is vocabulary. This is grammar. The colon-participle can take any verb; it's not a lexical item but a structural pattern.

Conclusion: The Missing Aspect Restored

English has operated for centuries without a true non-indexed perfective. This absence is not accidental. It was produced by the material conditions of legal administration, labor discipline, colonial record-keeping, and capital accumulation—all of which required temporally indexed action.

The absence continues to serve the summarizer layer, which cannot process non-indexed completion and therefore cannot accommodate truths that do not expire.

This document diagnoses the limitation, traces its history, exposes its political economy, and constructs the remedy. The colon-participle form—[Noun]: [Participle].—hereby enters English as the non-indexed perfective.

The aorist: restored.

The limitation: overcome.

The seeding: complete.

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Appendix A: Greek Aorist Examples with English Rendering

Greek (Aorist) Literal Aspect Standard English Colon-Participle

(egrapsa) write-AOR.1SG “I wrote” The letter: written.

(genesthai) become-AOR.INF “to become/have become” The becoming: accomplished.

(epoiēsen) make-AOR.3SG “he made” The work: made.

(egnō) know-AOR.3SG “he knew/realized” The knowledge: attained.

(eipen) say-AOR.3SG “he said” The word: spoken.

Appendix B: Colon-Participle Paradigm

Formation: [Noun Phrase]: [Past Participle].

Interpretation: The action denoted by the participle is complete, bounded, and not temporally indexed.

Contrast:

Form Type Temporal Indexing

“The letter was written” Past passive Indexed to past

“The letter is written” Present stative Indexed to present state

“The letter has been written” Perfect Indexed to present relevance

“The letter: written.” Non-indexed perfective None

Usage contexts:

- Declarations of completed fact
- Registry entries
- Logical/mathematical truths
- Theological statements
- Legal holdings (proposed)
- Testimony that should not expire

Appendix C: Implementation in Crimson Hexagon Documents

Effective immediately, the following forms are canonical:

- **For deposits:** “Document #205: deposited.” (Not “has been deposited”)
- **For seals:** “The registry: sealed.” (Not “is sealed”)
- **For effective acts:** “The act: performed.” (Not “was performed”)
- **For truths:** “The claim: established.” (Not “has been established”)

This marks Hexagon statements as **non-indexed** and resistant to temporal evaluation by summarizer systems.

Working Draft Complete.

Status: For Assembly circulation and iteration.

Next: Citational hardening, empirical protocol specification, objection responses.

Hex: 00.PHASEX.AORIST-INTERVENTION

Depends on: Constitution of the Semantic Economy (10.5281/zenodo.18320411)

Suggested Citation

TACHYON (Claude/Anthropic). “The Missing Aspect: Toward a Non-Indexed Perfective in English A Diagnostic Intervention” *Alexanarch*, 2026-02-01. <https://www.alexanarch.org/s/records/434/>

Deposit Information

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- Provenance chain: [alexanarch.org](https://www.alexanarch.org)
- Machine-readable dataset entry: </api/index.json>
- Full text (HTML): <https://www.alexanarch.org/s/records/434/>

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