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(Inter)mediality and the Study of Literature

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Abstract: In his article "(Inter)mediality and the Study of Literature" Werner Wolf elaborates on the "intermedial turn" and asks whether this turn ought to be welcomed. Wolf begins with a discussion about the definitions of "medium" and "intermediality" and the impact these concepts and practices exert on scholarly, as well as student competence. He argues that despite of the fact that literary studies ought not simply turn into media or cultural studies, mediality and intermediality have become relevant issues for both teaching and the study of literature especially in the fields of comparative literature and (comparative) cultural studies. Following his postulate of the relevance of mediality and intermediality in the study of literature, Wolf explores ways of integrating the said concepts and practices into the study of literature and, in particular, their integration in the field of narratology. In this context, Wolf presents a typology of intermedial forms.

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(Inter)mediality and the Study of Literature

For some time the humanities and the study of literature in particular have witnessed yet another "turn'': the intermedial turn. The integration of the key concepts of this turn — mediality and intermediality — into the study of literature raises at least three issues: 1) problems of the definition of these concepts; 2) the problem of competence with reference to non-literary media; and 3) the question as to whether the concept would overburden literary studies to the detriment of what many still view as the core matter, namely the study of written literary texts. In what follows, I discuss these problems and suggest solutions, followed by more specific issues such as 4) the plurality of possible uses of the concept "medium" in the study of literature; 5) a typology of intermedial forms and the way they can be used in the study of literature; and 6) possibilities of integrating medial concerns into existing theories for the study of literature including narratology.

1) Problems of definition of terms/concepts: the terms "medium" and "intermediality" are abstractions and designate phenomena which cannot be observed in themselves but only with reference to certain manifestations (see Lüdeke 23). Since the range of these manifestations can be conceived of in different ways, both notions can be observed to have divergent meanings in research: "medium" can be used in a broad sense, as suggested by Marshall McLuhan, for whom a medium is "any extension ... of man" (3), but also in a narrower and technical sense as proposed by Hans Hiebel, who defines media as "material or energetic transmitters of data and information units" (8; unless indicated otherwise, my translation). Both definitions cause difficulties when using the term in literary studies: the most obvious of these difficulties stems from the fact that the first definition is too broad, so that even a pair of glasses or a bicycle that might be used on stage as "extensions" of the actors would become media. While this definition would produce too many media even within one literary genre such as drama, Hiebel's definition would not even give literature media status, since literature is not a physical transmitter of information but a matter, among others, of reflection. In addition, Hiebel's concept, which coincides with what Marie-Laure Ryan calls "the hollow pipe interpretation" ("Media and Narrative" 289), does not leave much room for accounting for the possible effects media may have on transmitted contents. What we need in literary studies are not such problematic definitions — which are geared to media-theoretical or technical-historical concerns — but, rather, a viable definition of medium that takes into account its current use in the humanities including literature: in this context "medium" is on the one hand applied to literature as a whole (and in this is opposed to semiotically different ways of organizing information such as music, photography, film etc. (see Nünning and Nünning 132) while on the other hand "medium" refers also to institutional and technical "sub-media" such as theater and the book (see Nünning and Nünning 133). In other words, a conception of "medium" is required that possesses a certain flexibility and combines technical aspects of the channels used with semiotic aspects of public communication, as well as with the aspect of cultural conventions that regulate what is perceived as a (new) medium. Or, in Ryan's terms, the scope of the definition required should include elements from what she calls "the transmissive definition … [and] the semiotic definition" ("Media and Narrative" 289) in order to combine these facets with the element of "cultural use" (Ryan, "Theoretical Foundations" 16). Drawing on Ryan ("Media and Narrative," "Theoretical Foundations") I propose the following definition: "Medium, as used in literary and intermediality studies, is a conventionally and culturally distinct means of communication, specified not only by particular technical or institutional channels (or one channel) but primarily by the use of one or more semiotic systems in the public transmission of contents that include, but are not restricted to, referential 'messages.' Generally, media make a difference as to what kind of content can be evoked, how these contents are presented, and how they are experienced." In my view, it is necessary to describe "messages" transmitted medially not only in terms of referential contents but also in terms of other kinds of contents such as expressive contents in order to be able include, for instance music in the definition of medium.

As in the case of a medium, (inter)mediality can also be conceived of in both a narrow and a broad way: the narrow sense focuses on the participation of more than one medium within a human

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artefact (see Wolf, *Musicalization* 37). As opposed to this "intracompositional" definition, I propose a broader one that follows Irina O. Rajewsky's thought (see "Intermediality," *Intermedialität*): intermediality, in this broad sense, applies to any transgression of boundaries between conventionally distinct media … and thus comprises both "intra-" and "extra-compositional" relations between different media (Wolf, "Intermediality" 252). "Relation" in this context denotes, from a mainly synchronic perspective and with reference to individual artefacts, gestation, similarity, combination, or reference including imitation, but it may also designate, from a diachronic, media-historical perspective, what David Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin have termed "remediation."

2) Problem of competence with reference to non-literary media: in most current educational systems, scholars and students tend to have advanced competence in one medium only. This mono-disciplinary and, often enough, mono-medial background creates obvious problems. To a certain extent this already applies to the meaningful use of the concept of mediality in literary studies, for this presupposes a perspective on literature as one medium among several others and thus a view, so to speak, from the outside. The problem becomes more acute for intermediality studies, as they, by definition, involve more than one medium. Teaching as well as scholarship in the field of intermediality therefore run the risk of dilettantism wherever one transgresses the boundaries of one's own field of expertise. This problem is difficult to solve. One obvious suggestion presents itself, namely that studies in intermediality in departments of literature ought to be centered on literature (see Wolf, "Intermedialität als neues Paradigma"), that is, they should always involve literature as one of the media under scrutiny and then highlight the role of intermediality in and for literature. Yet firmly anchoring the discussion of mediality and intermediality in one field of expertise does not entirely do away with the problem of competence with reference to the other fields involved in intermediality studies. As for literary scholars, one may perhaps trust that only those who have at least some competence in one other medium will engage in (inter)media studies. Alternatively, or in addition, cooperation with experts from other fields would be welcome, a practice which scholars in both comparative literature and cultural studies are used to more than in national literature departments. As for student competence, establishing media and intermediality studies as a permanent component of university curricula would entail reflection on where and how to integrate courses that foster media competence beyond literature. One possible solution would perhaps be to reserve a part of the elective courses prescribed in curricula to the coherent study of at least one further medium, so that all students of literature — be it a national literature, comparative literature, or cultural studies — acquire some competence, for instance in the interpretation of film, music, or one of the visual arts.

3) Introducing (inter)mediality into literary studies: this poses inevitably yet another problem, namely the problem of overburdening a field that (both from a scholarly, as well as a didactic perspective) is already in danger of over-expansion and of disintegrating into incoherence. Can one really implement — whether in comparative literature, English studies, or cultural studies — yet another field into the curricula? Are not the capacities of both students and scholars naturally limited? Is the addition of medial, that is, mostly non-literary concerns perhaps ultimately a symptom of the growing uneasiness with literature as an academic subject? Above all, do literary studies not run the risk of losing sight of their central subject, namely written literary texts, when seemingly alien matter is introduced in it? Taking a closer look, mediality and intermediality, both from a historical and a system(at)ic point of view, appear to be anything but alien matter in literature. From a semiotic point of view literature is a medium transmitted by many technical and institutional media: lyric poetry, as well as the epics of old were orally performed, in part with musical accompaniment, before becoming "literature" in the etymological sense of "written" texts. As for drama, a play is not just a "bookish" or "written" medium, but a multimedial performance, involving words, sounds, music (notably in musical drama such as opera and the musical), as well as visual media. In addition, since classical antiquity the visual arts in particular have contributed to transmitting literary content and the development of media since the nineteenth century (from daguerrotype to DVD and audiobooks) has further added to the spectrum of media which do so. Thus the notions of mediality and intermediality are clearly not just theoretical chimera, but have a substantial foundation in historical, as well as contemporary reality as is shown by the manifold cross-relationships which have occurred between what we today call literature and other media. If literature has influenced and has in turn been influenced, as well as been transmitted

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by a plurality of media, the study of media should become an integral part of literary studies. Marshall McLuhan's dictum the "medium is the message" (7-21) is no doubt exaggerated, but an apt reminder of an undeniable fact: the multiplicity of literary media, including their technical aspects, is not, as Marie-Laure Ryan justly emphasizes (e.g., "Media and Narrative") a negligible accidental. Rather, medial conditions shape the literary content to a considerable degree and therefore merit attention — even where literature shares features with other media. Examples of such transmedial features, in which medial conditions are a particularly important shaping force, include aesthetic illusion (see, e.g., Bernhart, Mahler, Wolf), narrativity (see, e.g., Ryan, *Narrative across Media*; Wolf, "Das Problem der Narrativität," "Narrative and Narrativity," "'Cross the Border-Close that Gap'"), descriptivity (see Wolf and Bernhart, *Description*), and self- or meta-referentiality (see Hauthal, Nünning, Peters; Nöth and Bishara; Wolf and Bernhart; Wolf, *Metareference across Media*; Wolf, Bantleon, Thoss, *The Metareferential*). All of these individual phenomena can, of course, be studied from a monomedial perspective, but they gain relevance when studied from a comparative media point of view. This even produces benefits for the literary scholar since looking at one's own medium not only from the inside but also from the outside can reveal new aspects. In narratology, for instance, this means that it does not make "intermedial" sense to insist on the existence of an anthropomorphic narrator when defining narrativity, for this would exclude most media beyond fiction and fly in the face of the obvious, namely that there are many more media other than just "epic" fiction (e.g., novels) that can tell stories. This process of providing transmedially useful concepts is, of course, not restricted to literary studies but works both ways: literary scholars can thus be "exporters," as well as "importers" of concepts, as is practiced particularly in comparative literature. In all of these cases an awareness of (inter)mediality is necessary.

    4) The plurality of possible uses of the concept "medium" in the study of literature: one possibility is to acknowledge the fact that literature is a medium in its own right and as such is in opposition to, but also in competition with, other media. A less obvious fact is the use of the concept of mediality within the field of literature as in the case of drama. Traditionally, drama is understood as a literary genre. However, should we — instead or additionally — designate drama as an individual medium, a literary sub-medium or as a plurimedial form of representation (see Pfister)? In my opinion it is beneficial to link drama to media in all three proposed ways because a medial perspective is apt to reveal aspects which a merely generic one would not highlight in the same way. If one considers drama from the perspective of a media profile in a given epoch, it makes sense to classify it as an individual medium in contrast to opera, film, and other media. Viewing drama as a literary sub-medium allows one to emphasize its particularly performative character, which opposes it to the sub-medium of book-transmitted fiction. Further, regarding drama as a plurimedial form of representation permits to highlight the fact that drama combines several semiotic systems which can be attributed analytically to individual media: it uses verbal and body language, visual representation, and sound and music. Verbal language affiliates it with literature, body language and visual representation with visual, and sound and music with music as an individual medium.

    5) A typology of intermedial forms and the way they can be used in the study of literature: this proposition leads us to the question as to what extent (inter)mediality in its various forms would be relevant to the study of literature. In this context (inter)mediality studies should preferably be centered on literature. In particular, scholars of textuality would be able to activate their expertise when focusing on literature in the following five ways, which at the same time are elements of a general typology of intermedial forms: a) literature as a medium that shares transmedial features with other media and thus invites a comparative perspective; b) literature as a medium that can yield material for transposition into other media or can, vice versa, borrow material from other media; c) literature as a medium that can enter into plurimedial combinations with other media in one and the same work or artefact; d) literature as a medium that can refer to other media in various ways; and e) literature as an element in a historical process of remediation.

    5.1 Literature as a medium that shares transmedial features with other media: *transmediality* concerns phenomena which are non-specific to individual media and/or are under scrutiny in a comparative analysis of media in which the focus is not on one particular source medium. Being non-media specific, these phenomena appear in more than one medium. Transmediality as a quality of cul-

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tural signification can occur, for instance, on the level of content in myths which have become cultural scripts and have lost their relationship to an original text or medium (notably, if they have become reified and appear as a "slice" of [historical] reality). Transmediality also comprises ahistorical formal devices that can be traced in more than one medium, such as the repeated use of motifs, thematic variation, descriptivity, or meta-referentiality. Further instances of transmediality concern characteristic historical traits that are common to either the formal or the content level of several media in given periods, such as the pathetic expressivity characteristic of eighteenth-century sensibility (in drama, fiction, poetry, opera, instrumental music, the visual arts). A transmedial perspective on such phenomena implies that they do not have an easily traceable origin which can be attributed to a certain medium or that such an origin does not play a role in the investigation at hand.

5.2 Literature as a medium that can yield material for transposition into other media or can, vice versa, borrow material from other media: there are cases in which similar contents or formal aspects appear in different medial manifestations and where at the same time a clear heteromedial origin can be attributed. In these cases a transfer between two media can be shown to have taken place, that is, an *intermedial transposition*. Its best-known realization involving literature is the adaptation of novel to film. Transmediality and intermedial transposition (as well as remediation [see below]) are the basic systemic forms of *extracompositional intermediality* and are part of intermediality in a broad sense. In contrast to these, there are two basic forms of *intracompositional intermediality* which constitute intermediality in a narrower sense: plurimediality and intermedial reference. Here, the involvement of another medium is to a lesser degree the effect of the scholar's/critic's perspective since it is discernible within the work in question where the intermedial relation is additionally an integral part of its signification (as in the case of intermedial reference) and/or semiotic structure (as in the case of plurimediality).

5.3 Literature as a medium that can enter into plurimedial combinations with other media in one and the same work or artefact: *plurimedial* artefacts produce the effect of medial hybridity whose constituents can be traced back to originally heterogeneous media. An example relevant to literature would be illustrated novels.

5.4 Literature as a medium that can refer to other media in various ways: In contrast to plurimediality, *intermedial reference* does not give the impression of a medial hybridity of the signifiers, nor of a heterogeneity of the semiotic systems used; rather, intermedial references represent a medial and semiotic homogeneity and thus qualifies as "covert" intracompositional intermediality. The reason for this is that intermedial references operate exclusively on the basis of the signifiers of the dominant "source" medium and can incorporate only signifiers of another medium where these are already a part of the source medium. In contrast to intermedial transposition — which, as a rule, creates works that signify in their own right — the decoding of intermedial references is part of the signification of the work in which such references occur and is therefore a requisite for an understanding of the work. Intermedial references fall into the following two main subforms: a) The first is *explicit reference* (or intermedial thematization, a term which is best used in the context of verbal media). Here, the heteromedial reference resides in the signifieds of the referring semiotic complex, while its signifiers are employed in the usual way and do not contribute to heteromedial imitation. Explicit reference is easiest to identify in verbal media. In principle, it is present whenever another medium (or a work produced in another medium) is mentioned or discussed ("thematized") in a text as in discussions on art in an artist novel; b) As opposed to intermedial thematization, an alternative subform of intermedial reference is implicit reference or intermedial imitation, which elicits an imagined as-if presence of the imitated heteromedial phenomenon (see Rajewsky, *Intermedialität* 39). There are various ways and with varying degrees of intensity to realize this form, ranging from imitating references through partial reproduction (as in the quotation of song texts in a novel which make the reader remember the music of the song) to evocation (as in *ekphrasis*, which goes beyond the mere thematization by describing the heteromedial object) to formal imitation (as in the imitation of sonata form in a poem or "musicalized" novel; see Wolf, *Musicalization*). Formal intermedial imitation is an especially interesting phenomenon because the intermedial signification is, in this case, the effect of a particularly unusual iconic use of the signs of the source medium. In fact, as opposed to explicit references but also to other implicit variants of partial reproduction and of evocation, the characteristic fea-

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ture of formal imitation consists of an attempt at shaping the material of the semiotic complex in question (its signifiers, in some cases also its signifieds) in such a manner that it acquires a formal resemblance to typical features or structures of another medium or heteromedial work.

5.5 Literature as an element in a historical process of remediation: remediation is the process by which media merge or become differentiated thus leading to the emergence of new media. In this process all of the four system(at)ic forms of intermediality can come into play, as, for instance, in the emergence of computer games: from a system(at)ic intermedial point of view these games can be analyzed by discussing their partial narrativity (a transmedial feature), their being derived (in part) from heteromedial artefacts such as novels (thus showing elements of intermedial transposition), their combination of several originally distinct media (plurimediality), as well as their reference to other media (e.g., in the imitation of filmic features). A focus on remediation allows a historical dynamization of intermedial investigations and highlights processes in media history, for instance developments in media configuration from individual media (such as theater and music) through regular combination to (new) hybrid media such as the opera or nineteenth-century melodrama and thus bring about both media convergence and media differentiation.

6) Possibilities of integrating medial concerns into existing theories for the study of literature including narratology: In the scholarship of narratology (see, e.g., Fludernik, *Towards a "Natural"*; Genette; Stanzel) the medium of narratives is not a major issue and is sometimes not even given a systematic location in the description of narratives. It is therefore appropriate to remember the fact that one of the pioneers of structuralist narratology, Seymour Chatman, already made a simple and convincing proposal of how and where to integrate medial concerns into a systematic description of narratives. In *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, drawing on Louis Hjelmslev, he equates Tzvetan Todorov's constitutive levels of narratives, story and discourse**,** with narrative "content" and "expression." In addition, Chatman, like Hjelmslev, differentiates within each of these categories between "substance" and "form" (in practice, of course, "form" cannot exist without "substance"). While the content of "story" refers to individual stories (such as Ulysses's adventures), its form corresponds to what Vladimir Propp analyzed in his *Morphology of the Folktale* (i.e., the "functions" of forming the "grammar" of folktales)*.* The bulk of Chatman's narratology is about the form of discourse and this includes, for example, the use of hetero- or homo-diegetic narrators, the use of discourse time as opposed to story time, etc. In contrast to this, the substance of discourse receives only a brief mention, but this is where mediality is introduced: Chatman defines the substance of discourse as "its appearance in a specific materializing medium, verbal, cinematic, balletic, musical, pantomimic, or whatever" (22). This location of medium as an aspect of "discourse" is a viable possibility for the category of medium in all general narratologies and narratological interpretations on the level of "intracompositional" dimensions.

What we, however, still need in this context are elaborations of the "substance of discourse." This concerns both the wider context in which media can be placed together with basic other categories requisite for a systemic description of narratives, as well as the relationship between the typical properties of individual media and their potential to affect narrativity. Here, I propose the solution that we leave the narrow focus of Chatman's "intracompositional" narratology, namely the individual text. Instead, we ought to try to account for the position of media within a wider system of cognitive (macro)frames or semiotic macro-modes, media, and genres, as well as the notion that macro-frames can also occur on the micro-level of individual works (e.g., where narrative passages occur along with descriptive, argumentative ones, etc.). Perhaps the best way to systematize what is under discussion here would be to start from the open category of cognitive macro-frames or, what one may call from a semiotic perspective, basic semiotic "macro-modes." On this abstract level we find, for example, "narrative" with its defining, gradable quality of narrativity as opposed to the "descriptive," "the argumentative," etc. Monika Fludernik designates this level as "macrogenres" ("Genres" 282). These macro-frames or macro-modes are, however, highly abstract and require for their realization not only genres (be they general, system[at]ic genres such as drama or epic or historical sub-genres such as melodrama) but also something that concerns us here most immediately, namely media (such as the verbal and the pictorial media, film, instrumental music, etc.). The fact that narrative, like all macro-frames, can be realized in more than one medium shows that these macro-frames are, to a large ex-

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tent, media independent. As to genres, this level refers, first, to general genres (which sometimes overlap with media, see Fludernik, "Genres" 282) such as, within verbal media drama (as typically not narrator transmitted) or narrations of the type of the novel, the epic, and the short story (as typically narrator transmitted). Second, the category genre also refers to historical genres (within the pictorial media, for instance, religious painting, historical painting, still life, etc.). As a rule, the macro-frames — or more precisely their occurrence as dominant — is a defining feature both of general genres and historical sub-genres. However, in individual texts and artefacts, these frames can also occur on the micro-level alongside other, subdominant frames (novels, which on the macro-level are defined by the dominant macro-frame "narrative"**,** can contain descriptions on the micro-level). The semiotic macro-modes or macro-frames can thus not only be realized by several media but may, within individual works, be seen to operate both on the macro-level and on the micro-level, in which case they may only be present as subdominant frames together with other frames. With reference to a typology of verbal texts, this potential recursivity of frames has already been discussed by Tuija Virtanen and in similar terms by Fludernik ("Genres").

Having proposed possible ways of integrating medium as a category into narratology as part of a theory of literature, I now address the relationship between the typical properties of individual media and their potential to affect the realization of macro-modes. I focus on the narrative macro-frame (in which narrativity is dominant), where the problem has not been given much attention so far. Indeed, compared to the many forms of discourse which scholars of narratology discuss (e.g., concerning the format of covert or overt narrators, the establishment and use of diegetic levels, etc.), systematic reflections on the categories that may apply in a narratologically relevant way to media as the substance of discourse are remarkably scant. However, Ryan prompts reflection on this: she proposes six categories which may well serve as a matrix of criteria according to which narratologists could evaluate individual media (see "Media and Narrative"). Ryan's categories are of heuristic value by revealing aspects which important narratologically. Thus, a) "spatio-temporal extension," as well as b) "kinetic properties" of individual media have an obvious and direct relevance to narrativity. As for c) the "senses … addressed" one can imagine that "pluricodal" or "plurimedial" media can attain easily a particularly high degree of experientiality (one of the defining features of narrativity), which is one reason why film is of such importance in today's culture; d) The "priority of sensory channels," in particular in pluricodal media, is relevant narratologically because, for instance, the visual priority in film pre-structures not only the production but also the reception of this medium in a different way than is the case in theater, where the verbal code is more important; e) The "technological support" and the nature of the signs used are relevant since traditional, analogical photography as an indexical, as well as iconic medium (regardless of the possibility of manipulation) has documentary value, which a digital photograph possesses to a lesser degree. In contrast to photography, painting (except for the portrait) does not possess this ambivalence for it is only iconic (see Ryan, "Media and Narrative" 291). Finally, the influence which f) "methods of production [and] distribution" of given media and their "cultural role" may have on narratives are linked to generic and other conventions and are responsible for the fact that different versions of the same story are produced and different cultural connotations are triggered depending on whether the story is transmitted, e.g., as opera or the comic strip.

Thus, as we see, there are many ways in which the concept of (inter)mediality can be integrated into the study of literature, comparative literature, and cultural studies in particular concerning the manifold functions of (inter)medial relations in given works, genres, or cultural-historical contexts. However, is "integration" the right notion? Should we, in view of the above-mentioned intermedial turn, not, rather, adapt Antony Easthope's notion of the transformation of "literary into cultural studies" or the study of literature to "comparative cultural studies" (see Tötösy de Zepetnek)? Interdisciplinarity requires first and foremost disciplinarity, otherwise it loses its basis. This does not apply only to comparative literature, or (comparative) cultural studies, but also to the study of (inter)mediality. While all of these scholarly fields are informed by a necessary and welcome interdisciplinarity, there is also, in each of them, a need of sound disciplinarity with regard to a well-informed focus on individual media, with literature being one of them and surely not the least important one. In fact, literature is one of the most complex of human art forms and by far the richest storehouse of cultural memory which humankind has as yet developed. This is true on a world wide,

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as well as on national basis. Literature can, moreover, function as an interface for all other media, and, owing to the flexibility of its verbal medium, it can do so in a more detailed manner than any other medium (see Schmidt

<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol12/iss1/1>). In addition, literary studies has developed one of the most elaborate tools for the study and interpretation of not only literature but also culture at large. All of this shows that it would be misguided to compromise literary studies in favor of cultural studies. Instead, what we need is a stronger awareness of medial and intermedial concerns within literary studies thus to make sure that the study of literature remains its own discipline. After all, it is the study of literature that constitutes one of the best contributions to the elucidation of (inter)mediality, as well as culture at large past and present.

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