

## A VERY LONG ENGAGEMENT: ENGLISH AND THE MOVING IMAGE

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The place of the moving image in English has a long but vexed history. It appears first as part of what F.R. Leavis and his colleagues saw as the unwelcome intrusion of the mass media into the cultural world of the young, another barbarism threatening the civilisation whose guardian, guarantor and representative Leavis took to be the literary culture of the 'Great Tradition' (1948). The same deep mistrust of film and cinema, along with visual media in general, was expressed in the early sixties by David Holbrook:

... the word is out of date. It is a visual age, so we must have strip cartoons, films, filmstrips, charts, visual aids. Language is superannuated. ...

Some teachers fall for the argument. ...

We must never give way: we are teachers of the responsiveness of the word. ... The new illiteracy of the cinema, television, comic strip, film-strip and popular picture paper they accept as the dawn of a new era. (Holbrook, 1961, 36-37)

Though negatively framed, Holbrook's diatribe accurately anticipates the fields in which this contest would be played out over successive decades. Like Leavis, he recognises that this is a battle over cultural value, just as media educators would later propose, though from the opposing standpoint. He recognises, too, that it is a question of literacy, and his characterisation of the 'new illiteracy' of visual media ironically prefigures today's rationales for multimodal literacy approaches. Finally, in a more specialised sense, he recognises that this is about a struggle for primacy between word and image: a struggle as old as the frescoes of sacred narratives painted for the illiterate congregations of mediaeval and Renaissance Europe; and as new as the attempts of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority of the UK government to assert the importance of literature study over the study of texts in other media:

Alongside views that media and screen-based texts [can] have their place in English 21 there is the caveat that these should never be at the expense of our rich book-based literary heritage – a point more fully elaborated in terms of the purpose and value of engaging with verbal language: *the study of literature has one conspicuous advantage over the study of film and television media, in that it develops the skills of analysis, argument and discourse alongside language skills.* (QCA, 2005, my italics)

This riposte to a considerable body of evidence from teachers, researchers and academics arguing for more space for media texts in the English curriculum reveals a profound conservatism directly descended from Leavis and Holbrook's antipathy to visual texts.

In many ways, however, the relationship between the moving image and the subject English over recent years can be seen in a more positive light. The rise of media education in the 1980s (Buckingham, 2003; Goodwyn, 2004), the longterm advocacy of

film education by film institutes such as the British Film Institute in the UK, and the development of curricular models of English in the Anglophone countries which increasingly recognise the importance of media texts, all contributed towards a contemporary view of English which, in principle at least, embraces moving image media within a wider notion of media education and an expanded model of literacy. These moves make sense not only in terms of a world where, some argue, the ‘turn to the visual’ is increasingly a feature of the semiotic and cultural landscape (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996). It also makes sense historically, if we consider the shared histories of literature, theatre and cinema: histories of narrative fictions written and performed, visually designed, taking place both in time and space, framed by proscenium arch and silver screen. These are histories of adaptation, of the restless migration of literary characters, from *Beowulf* to *Jane Eyre*, from printed page and book illustration to popular theatre and melodrama, film, stage musical, television adaptation, and even, more recently, computer game.

This chapter will focus on what the research can tell us about the moving image and English. Such an exercise comes with the inevitable caveat that this is a much under-researched area. A systematic review four years ago of the research literature on the moving image and literacy, for instance, found only 12 relevant studies internationally (Burn and Leach, 2004). While there has been a little more work in the intervening years, this topic remains something of a Cinderella subject in research terms, despite the popularity of film and moving image production work among media teachers (Grahame and Simons, 2004).

Nevertheless, the studies available suggest ways in which the moving image relates to specific aspects of English. These form the sections of the chapter, and are framed as: the moving image as an adjunct to the teaching of language and literature; the moving image in its own right; and the moving image as part of a more widely-conceived notion of literacy.

### **The moving image and the teaching of language and literature**

Showing the ‘film of the book’ has been a familiar experience in English classrooms the world over for many years, and teachers and students have encountered classic adaptations in this way, from Olivier’s *Henry V* to Ken Loach’s *Kes*.

However, a critical commentary inspired by the rationales of media education has accompanied the ‘film of the book’ practice, well-summarised by Andrew Goodwyn (2004), to whose book the reader is referred for a longer discussion of this question. From this perspective, the ‘film-of-the-book’ approach has been seen as a damaging practice, reducing film to the status of mere appendage to the authentic originating text. This critique derives partly from academic film studies, where perceptions of film adaptations as secondary to the literary original have given way to arguments for the autonomy of the film adaptation as a work of artistic merit, to be judged in its own right.

In practical terms, these arguments produce a different kind of classroom practice, in which the book and the film are taught side-by-side. This approach emphasises the structural features of film narrative and film 'grammar', comparing them to those of the literary text in order to find elements in common across both media as well as differences which make each medium distinctive. The comparative teaching of related literary and film texts implies a parity of cultural value, rather than a hierarchy privileging literature. A good example from recent years is an account by two teachers of their use of different film versions of *Macbeth*, using interactive whiteboards to present and compare short sequences, and drawing attention not only to detailed aspects of the play, but to how it is realised dramatically and filmically (Durrant and Morrison, 2004).

With the advent of digital authoring tools over the last ten years, recent research literature has focused more on how students make films as well as view and interpret them. Perhaps the first researched account of this, Julian Sefton-Green's chapter in *Making Media* (Buckingham *et al*, 1995) describes the making of a trailer for S.E. Hinton's teenage novel *The Outsiders* with a secondary school class. Sefton-Green's focus here is on the importance of popular culture, both in literature and film; but his argument is also that digitally manipulating the medium of film produces a shift of power in the relations between producers and audiences – an argument which has become very familiar in relation to digital authoring tools and, more recently, the participatory internet.

Another argument derived from production work with students is that production can also be a kind of analysis. Burn and Durrant (2006) describe how Year 9 students make their own sequences of *Romeo and Juliet* from Baz Luhrman's film in the editing software Adobe Premiere. This study suggests how the students gain a critical understanding, not only of Shakespeare's text, but of the significance of dramatic action, music, and the editing process in film production. They acquire these new understandings not only from close attention to the Shakespeare text, but by 'anatomising' the filmic text in order to remake it.

A related argument is made by Cliff Hodges (2005), who explores how filming sequences which visually re-imagine literary texts can provide insights into detailed aspects of poetic language. However, the argument here is that such exercises also draw attention to specific features of the moving image as a kind of language; and, indeed, to the act of reading, which can supply its own visual array of images in response to a literary text. A similar case is made by Burn (2003) in a study of teenage girls making films of their own bilingual poems, in which the making of the film provides insights into the language of poetry, but at the same time into the language of the moving image.

A further argument for the benefit of moving image production in English is that it may help to develop the quality of children's writing. This hypothesis is tested in a study conducted by the BFI in collaboration with King's College London (Parker, 1999; 2002), which worked with primary school children on the Roald Dahl story *Fantastic Mr Fox*, helping them to make a digital animation of sections of the story, and assessing their written work afterwards. The published results were tentative, but found some evidence of improvements in the descriptive detail of the children's writing, and their ability to

empathise with characters in the Dahl story. An obvious objection to the rationale proposed by this project is that it threatens to relegate the use of moving image work in the classroom to the instrumental role of a support for print literacy. In this particular case, however, while it was print literacy gains that the report emphasised, it is clear that the specific characteristics of the moving image received a good deal of attention, as might be expected from a project led by film specialists.

A different strand of research also makes claims for gains in print literacy, but in relation to computer games. It is the contention of this chapter that 3-D, narrative-based games such as adventure games or role-playing games can and should be considered as moving image texts, for two main reasons. Firstly, they deploy the moving image, in the form of animation, as the main mode of representation, with many of its familiar qualities: camera angle and movement, framed narrative space, spoken (sometimes written) dialogue, music. Secondly, in cultural terms games have a close relationship with cinema, and the two forms have influenced each other over recent years, as well as being associated in franchises which adapt from film to game (*The Matrix*, *Star Wars* and the Bond movies are the obvious examples); and from game to film (*Final Fantasy*; *Tomb Raider*; *Resident Evil*, *Silent Hill*).

One study (McClay, 2002) suggests that experience of computer games informs the fantasy writing of a teenage boy, resulting in more fluid, episodic narratives, and new genres of writing of which literacy educators need to become aware. The more specific claim that the boy's writing deepens the computer narratives by investing the characters with history is debatable; one of the games cited, from the *Final Fantasy* series, does construct extensive character histories through backstories conveyed via video and text. Arguably the issue here is more to do with the expectation of psychological depth, prized within both the traditions of Western drama and the novel; but completely untypical of oral narrative (Ong, 2002) and computer games, which one commentator has compared to Homeric narrative in their use of characters in whom psychological depth is simply not the point (Murray, 1997). Nevertheless, the general argument that games engender new kinds of writing deserves the consideration of English teachers, and clearly resonates with research in the production of fan fiction (Jenkins, 1992; 2006; Carr *et al*, 2006 ch 7).

Beavis (2001) also finds certain gains in print-literacy related to the experiences of computer games. Part of her analysis looks at the literate practices required of these students to play *Heroes of Might and Magic* and *Beyond Time* – reading instructions on and off screen, understanding and engaging with narrative structures and fantasy genres, interpreting iconic signification and moving image sequence, such as the cut scenes (pre-rendered animation distinct from the interactive game sequences). She also goes on to analyse how the writing of selected students can demonstrate critical distance, in reviews of the games; but also can develop complex approximations to the experience of playing.

We have seen, then, examples of research exploring how the study or making of moving image texts can support the study of literature and language in English. Key issues identified are: the cultural argument for parity of esteem between moving image and literary texts; the learning benefits identified by Goodwyn of studying processes of

adaptation; the value of making and unmaking moving image texts in considering how meaning is made; and the need, ultimately, to develop extended models of literacy which can travel across semiotic modes and cultural forms, a theme to which the third section of this chapter will return.

### **The Moving Image in its own right**

Over three decades now, the most consistent campaign for the teaching of film in its own right in the UK has been made by the Education Department of the British Film Institute. It has proposed possible film-based curricula (FEWG, 1999), published resources (Bazalgette et al, 2001), and conducted training programmes to promote the teaching of short films in primary schools and the teaching of documentary film. At the same time, the BFI has consistently maintained a strategic link with the literacy curriculum. It has also pursued an advocacy campaign for moving image education within the English curriculum, and can claim substantial credit for the specific inclusion of requirements to study the moving image in recent versions of the National Curriculum for England.

The study of film in schools is closely related to the development of media education, and film educators currently make common cause in many ways with media educators, campaigning in Europe at the time of this chapter, for instance, for a charter for media literacy and a commitment by the European Parliament to the development of media literacy.

However, the history of film education also differs from that of media education. While the two have a common point of origin, as we have seen, in the cultural protectionism of Leavis, Film Education in Europe also has its roots in the film heritages of different European countries, and the impulse to educate children in this important part of 20<sup>th</sup> century culture. As in the UK, national film institutes in countries such as Sweden, France and Italy promote programmes of film education which focus on national and European heritages, archive collections, and contemporary independent film-making. In this respect, Europe maintains film education in conjunction with media education, unlike the United States, where media education has often been dominated by forms of moral protectionism (Buckingham, 2003), or South-East Asia, where it is more focused on popular mass media and new technologies (Lin, 2008).

In many ways, this can be seen as a strength in Europe. It seems odd that media education programmes in the US or South-East Asia should not include film when the film industry plays such a strong role in the economies and cultures of these regions. Certainly for many English teachers, to include film now seems natural, given its strong link with literature, and the value of teaching general categories such as text, narrative and genre across different media. At the same time, the broader tradition of media education provides possibilities for teaching different media, as well as a conceptual framework around which there is broad international consensus, and which includes key concepts such as institutions, audiences and representation alongside conceptions of text and signification (Buckingham and Domaille, 2003).

From a less positive viewpoint, these three traditions – English, Media and Film education – can be seen in tension. While English has often tended to favour traditional textual canons and traditional values of literature (whatever the more progressive inclinations of sectors of the profession), media education champions popular culture. While English has traditionally privileged language and print literacy, film and media education have allied themselves with broader conceptions of media literacy (Buckingham, 2003; Burn and Durrant, 2007), multiliteracy (Cope and Kalantzis, 2000), multimodal literacy (Jewitt & Kress, 2003). I overstate this opposition to make the contrast – film educators *do* engage with popular cinema and with television, and, have often been leading advocates of media education, as the record of the BFI amply demonstrates. Similarly, media teachers often enthusiastically teach iconic independent films, and incorporate film in their work as an important cultural form. This blurring of boundaries, seen in the world of both literacy education and Art education as an indication of new kinds of postmodern pedagogy (Green, 1995; Addison and Burgess, 2003), seems a hopeful move for a new kind of English curriculum, in which old barriers are relaxed, a profusion of cultural influences and texts are embraced, and contradictions of cultural politics are tolerated and explored.

While the advocacy for both Film and Media education has been strong in the UK, however, it has largely been a tradition of exhortation, speculative curriculum design and resource-making. Valuable though these processes are, there has been relatively little actual research in, for instance, the teaching and learning of moving image culture in the classroom.

There have been three large studies in recent years: an evaluation of the use of digital cameras and editing softwares in 50 schools in the UK (Reid et al, 2002); a study of children in seven European countries using digital video production to explore their experience of migration (de Block et al, 2005); and a study of moving image production projects in nine UK schools (Lord et al, 2007). While none of these is specifically focused on the moving image and English, four themes can be identified which are relevant to English teachers.

The first is a debate about the explicit teaching of film ‘language’, which, although it is an old debate, is revived by these more recent research findings. Reid et al found that the student productions which were of the highest quality appeared where moving image literacy had been explicitly addressed by teachers. For example, a special school class had learned the conventions of shot construction and continuity editing, allowing a more effective sci-fi-themed film narrative to be made. This finding can be supported by more recent studies, such as Burn and Durrant (2007, chapter 5), where student pastiches of television hospital dramas are shaped by very specific teaching about shot set-up. On the other hand, a recent study of primary school children making films about their memories of childhood suggests that high quality work can also emerge where children draw on their own experience of media forms and conventions (Potter, 2005). In many ways, this debate parallels the perennial English debate about the teaching of grammar, and whether this enable students to read more analytically or write more effectively, or both. One way

to respond to these conflicting research findings about the grammar of the moving image might be to adopt a pragmatic, nuanced approach, in which children's prior media experience is taken into account, some freedom to experiment and to learn by practice is provided, and more explicit teaching is offered where appropriate. A more specialized aspect of the debate concerns the exact model of 'moving image grammar' that might be taught. The most popular choice here seem to be variations on the model of *mise-en-scene*, filming, editing and sound, of which the most authoritative version remains Bordwell and Thompson's *Film Art* (2001). An alternative approach to 'film language' will be briefly explored below.

The second theme is to do with identity. De Block et al (2005) explored how moving image production work could allow migrant children to negotiate their identities in relation both to the host culture of their new country and to the culture of their home country. The study found that the children used images, styles and genres from their home country as a touchstone and reminder; but also from global media forms such as hip-hop to stake a claim in forms of youth culture recognizable in the host community. While this is a media education intervention research project, not a study of English classrooms, it is the study which most forcibly makes a point echoed in much of the other research: that whenever children and young people make moving image texts, they represent, either directly or obliquely, their own identities and cultural preoccupations. Identity is not a notion common in the discourse of schools: media education research insists that it is indispensable for teachers working on media production projects with young people. In the context of primary school video-making, Potter (2008) describes two 10-year-old girls making a video about their memories of school. His argument is that identity here is constructed from memory fragments which use objects and spaces around the school as touchstones. This analysis, which conceives of identity-building in terms of Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* (1984), offers a conception of the film-making process which gets beyond the technologies and grammars of filming and editing, and proposes how embodied performance and physical space contribute to the meanings of the children's film.

The third theme is that of creativity. Reid et al (2002) found that, while teachers invariably felt that their students' work was creative, they were uncertain about what this might mean. Many suggested that creativity meant freedom from constraint, which appeared to contradict the finding that the best work emerged from quite formal understandings of the 'language' of the moving image. By contrast, Burn and Durran (2007: chapter 2), in a study of 7-year-olds making plasticine animations of fairy tales, proposed a more specific view of creativity, modeled on Vygotsky's essay on the subject, which proposed that creativity was a combination of the imaginative transformation of cultural resources and the processes of rational thought. Lord et al (2007) usefully developed a typology of creativity in relation to the moving image, which in itself would be valuable for practitioners and researchers to use and adapt. They also found, interestingly, that there was rather less evidence of creativity (as assessed by their typology) than project leaders claimed in interviews.

The lesson here, perhaps, is that creativity is too important a process to reify or leave to chance. Whatever teachers believe it to be, they may need to be reflective about what it means, how it relates both to notions of originality and apprenticeship, how it may be both new and borrowed from earlier cultural experience, how it may be both free and constrained.

The fourth theme is to do with learning progression. Lord *et al* found, returning to the schools after a period of time, that all the effects they recorded had weakened over time, since no provision was made to sustain them. The message here is about the need for learning progression, in the sense we have always taken for granted in relation to print literacy. Such progression will probably not be dictated by ‘ages and stages’ models, a point made forcibly by Buckingham (2003); but rather by recursive models, attentive to gradual, uneven and often unpredictable breakthroughs, repetitions, incremental developments, expansions of scope, maturity, complexity, technical skills (Burn and Durran, 2007, chapter 9).

### **Moving image literacy**

An early and prominent version of the idea of moving image literacy can be found in the research of David Buckingham, which draws on the traditions of Cultural Studies and on the new sociology of childhood. His 1993 study *Children Talking Television* has the subtitle *The Making of Television Literacy*, and it documents how children are able from a relatively early age to make sense of the representational strategies of this form of moving image culture. His 1996 study *Moving Images* explores how children and teenagers engage with film and television in an affective sense, negotiating the powerful emotions provoked by moving image texts and using these emotions for their own pleasures, identity formation and journey through adolescence.

More recent research has explored how young people’s engagement with fictional worlds crosses different media forms and cultures. Henry Jenkins sees this phenomenon as ‘convergence culture’ (Jenkins, 2006), an example being his Harry Potter fan, Heather, whose online tribute site refers to different media expressions of the Harry Potter *mythos*. Similarly, my own studies of Harry Potter fans (Burn 2004; 2006) show 13-year-olds engaging with the figure and narratives of Harry Potter across book, film and computer game.

These studies give a strong, empirically-based sense of what kinds of moving image literacy children acquire from their own media cultures, and of the social motivations and uses which generate such informal literacies. The challenge implied for media and film educators, and English teachers too, is how to take proper account of this kind of literacy, and build on it.

In the context of formal education, there is a theme which considers moving image literacy as multimodal (cf Jewitt and Kress, 2003). This research is limited and specific, and a particular feature of my own work. Three studies (Burn and Parker, 2001; 2003; Burn and Durran, 2007, chapter 3) analyse data from a long-running animation project, in

which primary school children made short digital animations of texts chosen by the teachers, with the help of teachers, animators and composers-in-residence. The research underlined the idea of multimodal literacies which were here integrated by the moving image. While the film-making involved learning the specific practices of shot construction, editing and animation, it also involved other semiotic modes: visual design (often painted artwork), music composition, performance, recording and editing; and spoken language (the scripting and voicing of character dialogue and voiceover). This model of the 'language' of the moving image, termed 'kineikonic' in these studies (the Greek for move, 'kinein', and image, 'eikon') offers an alternative to the conventional model elaborated by Bordwell and Thompson, as discussed above. The problem, however, lies in how a pedagogy might be built around such a model, and how a sufficient consensus might be built to justify such a pedagogy.

A broader conception of media literacy, which would encompass moving image forms such as film, television and games alongside print media and internet-based media, has become prominent in recent years. In many ways, this is policy-driven rather than based on research. A literature review for the UK regulator OFCOM (Buckingham et al, 2006) presents a range of research evidence to demonstrate that, while children gain a considerable degree of media literacy informally, from home, peers and the media itself, there is also a case for educational intervention. As the idea of media literacy has gathered pace, a popular which has gained a wide degree of consensus is the notion of three 'C's – cultural, critical and creative. This is endorsed by the UK and European Media Literacy charters; by the UK industry-funded organisation Film Education; and, indeed, has become a model for literacy generally in the UK National Curriculum. For the purposes of this chapter, the implications of such a model for the moving image can be teased out. Firstly, the cultural aspect of moving image literacy would, as we have seen, need to take account not only of national film heritage, but also of the importance of popular cinema in the cultural lives of young people. Secondly, the critical aspect would need to take account of the textual forms of the moving image, as well as the political economy of its production in the film, television and games industries; and, furthermore, how audiences engage with and interpret moving image media. Finally, the creative aspect would need to consider how young people make their own moving image texts, both outside and inside school, and how such forms of production use and transform cultural resources, display understandings of design and production, and deploy new forms of exhibition, display and exchange such as YouTube, file-sharing sites and other kinds of web publishing. However, the exhibition modes of 'old' media should not be dismissed: the UK Film Council-funded First Light programme now shows work made by school students in the form of pay-per-view films carried by the UK's Virgin cable television provider. Such work belongs to a long tradition of the exhibition of children's films in the context of festivals: the Co-op Young Film-Makers festival in the UK, for instance, has exhibited hundreds of films by young people in the National Film Theatre in London and the National Museum of Photography, Film and Television in Bradford.

### **New Moving Image forms**

This chapter has inevitably been mainly concerned with film and to a lesser extent television. The more specialised medium of animation, discussed above, overlaps with newer moving image media, such as 3-D computer games, immersive virtual worlds and machinima. These forms, closely related to cinema and television, are explored in a small but growing literature in relation to literacy. Pelletier (2005) proposes that game design by 12-year-old students in the UK is closely related to the performance of gendered identity, in respect not only of their own pleasures and interests, but of social expectations of them in schools and in their peer group. Buckingham and Burn (2007), analysing game designs made by Year 8 students, propose a model of ‘game literacy’ based on the notion of media literacy outlined above, arguing that game design is *cultural* (strongly influenced by students’ gaming experience), *critical* (involving new understandings of game grammar and design principles), and *creative* (proceeding from the imaginative transformation of semiotic resources). Implications for English teachers here can be seen partly as cultural – that if their domain includes (in addition to literature) film and television, why would it not include a cultural form such as games, so closely related in form and franchise to these older visual media? However, there is also a linguistic argument – the grammar of games, which at one level can be seen as a narrative constructed in the conditional mood (“If the player turns left, then the treasure chest opens”), can, if explicitly explored, lead to more complex understandings of how narrative is created at a grammatical level across different media.

Finally, a brief word on the relatively new phenomenon of machinima. This is really a form of animation which uses the resources of 3-D games or virtual worlds, staging dramas performed by players as avatars, capturing these, and editing them, adding dialogue, sound and music. The word machinima is a portmanteau of machine and cinema (Kelland et al, 2005). There is very little research about this as yet, and only two studies that can be related to the English and media curricula. The first is an article by Carroll and Cameron (2005), drama educators who relate the performance aspect of machinima to traditions of educational process drama, arguing that the conventions of role-play in each form are closely related. The second is my own study of an animator and educator in the UK who has made machinima films with a group of teenagers in the immersive virtual world Second Life (Burn, 2008: chapter 8). The arguments for this activity as a viable part of the media curriculum are similar to those that would be made for animation projects. Two key differences are: that students act character parts as avatars in the game environment (making the activity more similar to live film in this respect); and the whole enterprise is culturally situated within game culture rather than film culture.

## CONCLUSION

The arguments emerging from the research for incorporating the moving image into the English curriculum can be subsumed under the ‘3-Cs’ model of media literacy (and, indeed, literacy more generally). The cultural aspect of literacy is expanded by the cultural contexts of television and film (both popular and arthouse); the critical element is expanded and reinforced by a wider conceptual understanding of textuality, and the

regimes of production and reception which frame it; the creative element is expanded by the extension of semiotic repertoires available to students into the audiovisual domain of the moving image. I return finally to Henry Jenkins' notion of convergence culture. Perhaps the most profitable territory for English teachers to exploit is that of cross-media narratives, pursuing the kind of literacy that needs to be envisaged to account for children who 'read' Harry Potter across book, film and game. However, the English curriculum can pursue this kind of trans-media phenomenon not only across the cultural and semiotic landscape of the contemporary moment, but through a historical process of textual transformation also. Perhaps a project of the near future for practitioners and researchers to pursue together could be the transformation of the Beowulf narrative from the Old English manuscript, through various film adaptations including the impressive comicstrip animation recently scripted by graphic novelist Neil Gaiman, to the computer game version of this film. Such an enterprise offers to bridge many of the gaps these research studies suggest teachers need to cross: semiotic, cultural, pedagogic.

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