THE DRAMATIC WRITING OF ORIANA FALLACI BETWEEN JOURNALISM AND LITERATURE

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> This paper focuses on the famous "Fallaci interviews", which are an example of what has been defined as "journalit" (Krim 1970), i.e., a non-fictional practice that is based on real events but still uses the resources of fiction and is permeated by real inventions and creative licenses (Castellana 2021; Mongelli 2015). Fallaci is a skilled playwright who knows how to "write the journalistic piece by the means of fiction and the story by the means of journalism" (Aricò 2010) to increase the dramatic character of her writings. But she also loves to show herself as a self-made woman always ready to go "on stage" (Scheer 1981: 92): the writer is a sort of "fictional witness", a testimonial character that plays a privileged role through her writing and her presence, approaching the genre of autofiction (Doubrovsky 1977; Grell 2014; Marchese 2014, 2019) and, in some ways, of the testimonio novelizado (Beverley 1992, 1993; Jara and Vidal 1986). For these reasons, Fallaci can be put on an ideal guideline that goes from Malaparte to Pasolini (and, today, maybe to Roberto Saviano) (Altamura 2019). Like the "corsaro", she is convinced that writing is a creative, critical, "instinctive" practice capable of undermining power, which is by its nature ambiguous and obscurantist. But, in our view, she has neither the expressiveness of Malaparte, nor the civil tension and poetic consistency of Pasolini. Her dimension seems to refer rather to the category of "midcult" (Macdonald 2018), i.e. a cultural typology based on the late or postmodern re-use of ideas, resources, languages from high culture, but not always endowed with intrinsic originality and innovativeness and able to express universal values. Net of all this, Fallaci's writing remains an admirable example of how it is possible (even at the cost of some contradictions) to combine the ethical values of journalistic-literary testimony with the codes of mass spectacularity, guaranteeing a productivity which, however, does not limit the quality standard of the work.

Keywords: New Journalism, neutrality, non-fiction, interview, testimony

ДРАМСКОТО ПИШУВАЊЕ НА ОРИЈАНА ФАЛАЧИ МЕЃУ НОВИНАРСТВОТО И КНИЖЕВНОСТА

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> Оваа статија се фокусира на познатите "Интервјуа на Фалачи", кои се пример за она што се дефинира како journalit (Krim 1970), односно, нефикциска практика што се базира на вистински настани, но ги употребува ресурсите на фикција ша, какви што се книжевна инвентивност и креативна слобода (Castellana 2021; Mongelli 2015). Фалачи е вешт драматург, кој знае како "да напише новинарски текст преку постапки што се употребуваат во фикцијата, а приказна преку новинарски постапки" (Aricò 2010) за да го зголеми драмскиот ефект во своите пишувања. Но, исто така, таа сака да се покаже и како самоизградена жена подготвена да се качи "на сцената" (Scheer 1981: 92): писателот е вид "фикциски сведок", лик што сведочи и игра привилегирана улога преку своите пишувања и своето присуство, приближувајќи му се на жанрот автофикција (Doubrovsky 1977; Grell 2014; Marchese 2014, 2019) и, на некој начин, на testimonio novelizado (Beverley 1992, 1993; Jara and Vidal 1986). Од овие причини, Фалачи може да се вброи во струјата што оди од Малапарте до Пазолини (и денес можеби до Роберто Савиано) (Altamura 2019). Како и Пазолини, таа е убедена дека пишувањето е креативна, критичка, "инстинктивна" практика, способна да ја поткопа моќта, која по природа е двосмислена и нетранспарентна. Но, според нашето гледиште, таа ја нема експресивноста на Малапарте ниту граѓанската тензија и поетската конзистентност на Пазолини. Нејзината димензија изгледа како повеќе да се однесува на категоријата midcult (Macdonald 2018), т. е. културна типологија базирана врз подоцнежната или постмодерна преупотреба на идеи, ресурси, јазик од високата култура, но не секогаш обележана со внатрешна оригиналност или иновативност и способна да изрази универзални вредности. И покрај ова, пишувањето на Фалачи останува одличен пример за тоа како може (дури и по цена на некои контрадикторности) да се комбинираат етичките вредности на новинарско-книжевното сведоштво со кодовите на масовната спектакуларност, гарантирајќи продуктивност што не го ограничува стандардот за квалитет на работата.

> **Клучни зборови**: ново новинарство, неутралност, нефикција, интервју, сведоштво

1 Introduction: Fallaci's writing between New Journalism and "testimonial narrative"

Fallaci's journalistic writing is a clear example of what Seymor Krim has defined as "journalit" (Aricò 2010, 26; Krim 1970), i.e., a non-fictional practice that is based on real events but still uses the resources of *fiction* and is permeated by reflections, judgments, personal suggestions, and even by real inventions and creative licenses (Aricò 2010: 108; Mongelli 2021). Especially in the famous "Fallaci interviews" (Fallaci 2009, 2010, 2014), her writing seems to be influenced by the models of New Journalism and its main exponents, such as Norman Mailer, Gay Talese, Truman Capote (Benotti 2009; Wolfe and Johnson 1973; Mongelli 2015), who were able to "write the journalistic piece by the means of fiction and the story by the means of journalism" (Zangrilli 2013: 256; Castellana 2021). At this stage, Fallaci tends more than ever to highlight her role as protagonist, splitting into auctor and agens, narrator and actress, as an author like Malaparte does in Tecnica del colpo di stato, in novels like Kaputt and La pelle or in the Second World War reportages collected in *Il volga nasce in Europa* (Malaparte 1997). Through this narratological strategy, which leans towards the genre of autofiction (Doubrovsky, 1977; Grell, 2013; Marchese 2014, 2019), the writer manages to create descriptive-narrative sequences with a strong dramatic tenor, as in the famous reports from Vietnam, which are full of pathos, or in the excited testimony on the clashes in Mexico City of 2 October 1968, the so-called "Tlatelolco Massacre", when the journalist was wounded by government forces during a student demonstration (Fallaci 2010c). The choice to avoid "neutrality" to increase the dynamic and dramatic character is partly due to the libertarian, anarchic psychology of Fallaci, but also responds to precise authorial reasons: the writer leans towards a type of testimonial story without renouncing her "strong" role as a reporter, 2 and while claiming the absolute centrality (though partial, partisan) of her vision, nonetheless she manages to represent a plurality of points of view, which are missing (or poorly considered) in the conventional media discourse. Fallaci is able to combine the reportage journalism with elements of the so-called "testimonio novelizado" (Beverley 1992, 1993; Jara and Vidal 1986): she is a sort of "fictional witness", a testimonial character that expresses – through her writing and her presence – a privileged point of view on the facts she wants to report. In this perspective we could interpret seemingly extemporaneous sequences such as the two Viet Cong diaries (which the author claims are original) interpolated into Niente e così sia: the Diario di un anonimo vietcong and the Diario di Le

¹ These famous interviews, which were at first published from the late Sixties to the beginning of the Eighties on *Il Corriere della Sera* and *L'Europeo*, have been collected in *Intervista con la storia* (1974) and in the posthumous volumes *Intervista con il Potere* (2009) and *Intervista con il mito* (2010).

² The notion of "testimonial self", as elaborated by scholars like John Beverley, is a sort of fiction device that represents a tacit, unofficial or unknown "reality" which has been "buried" under the layers of rhetorical hegemony. See J. Beverley, *El testimonio en la Encrucijada* (Beverley 1993), *Introducción*, in "Revista de Critica Literaria L.A." (Beverley 1992) and Jara and Vidal's *Testimonio y literatura*, (Jara and Vidal 1986). More recently, Marc Augé theorized the genre of the *ethnofiction* (Augé 2011).

Vanh Minh (ibid), which the writer receives from American soldiers and translates entirely. These are the manuscripts found on the corpses of two Communist fighters died on the battlefield: the first one is the meticulous regext of an anonymous Viet Cong struggling with the difficulties of the war; the other one is the diary dedicated by a fighter to his distant beloved. The texts are a middle ground between the "social history" document and the epic-lyrical representation of war and seem to share a quality that, had we not been informed by Fallaci of their authenticity, we could judge artificial, fictional, a little too "folkloric" or even romantic. This proves that Fallaci, though privileging her own point of view as a journalist and her own cultural horizon as a Western citizen, maintains a wide, multifocal gaze and is always in tension towards the Other.

2 The dramatic and "antagonistic" matrix of the interviews with the powerful of the Earth

Fallaci loves to show herself to her readers as a brave and strong-willed professional, a self-made woman always ready to go "on stage". "Of course, I'm an actress, an egotist. The story is good when I put myself in" (Scheer 1981: 92), declares the author in an interview. She is like a skilled playwright who prepares, with a strong sense of suspense, the scenography of her interviews and her reports: "They are pieces of theater. I prepare the questions but I follow the ideas that come. I build the suspense, and then I have coups de scene" (ibid, 100). The interview may resemble a show, but it must not be forgotten that it requires an impressive preparatory work, that often allows Fallaci to put the interviewee in the corner, thus reversing the balance of power: "the embarrassment or admiration of her interviewees comes from her minute and detailed knowledge of their lives, their thoughts, actions, mistakes" (Fabrizi 2014: 65). As reported by De Stefano: "She prepares assiduously, reading every scrap of information that exists about the person. The ingredients are always the same: careful research, impertinent questions, theatrical setup. Like the boy in the famous folktale who cries out that the emperor has no clothes, she is intimidated by no one" (De Stefano 2013: 210). This "training" follows the actual performance, but the most important moment is certainly the writing of the interview, when the materials collected "on the field" (notes, audio recordings, photos, memories, emotional suggestions and much more) are processed in their final form. This meticulous process emerges clearly in the interview with the leader of Solidarność, Lech Walesa, which starts ex abrupto:

"Enough is enough!". Walesa staggers with exhaustion, sleep, and discontent, and does not trust this stranger who, they said, throws the chador in Khomeini's face. So, the interview starts with a sort of fight. But it will continue with an understanding full of mutual respect and the next day it will end up in a great friendship: "Thank you. If I go to Heaven, I will hold your place". This pure, sincere, somewhat crazy man, this brilliant tribune, on whom the breath of tragedy blows. (Fallaci 2014b: 181)

Oriana Fallaci represents herself as "trendy, fast moving, fearless, having the last word" (Aricò 2010: 49), a woman able to engage a "competitive" dialectic

with her interlocutors: the dialogue does not have a regular or didactic quality and is always thrilling and enjoyable.

- Stop, stop, stop, stop.
- Why? What happened?
- It happens that you have a very authoritarian style, a typically dictatorial one. And as I do too, we have a problem. The problem is to find a compromise. So let's make a deal. From now on I will be nice with you and you will be nice with me, ok? (Fallaci 2014b: 182)

The result is an open-field fight, which tends to the spectacular dimension of the happening: the meeting with William Colby, CIA director from 1972 to 1974, becomes a dispute over the legitimacy of the means used by the US intelligence. Fallaci metaphorizes this fight through the image of a battle between insects.

For hours, just like two insects engaged in a battle, stinging and hurting each other, we had been throwing accusations and cruel words in our faces. (Ideological prejudices, he called them.) And the show had something absurd, on the edge of insanity. Poisoned by passion and anger, my voice sometimes trembled. His, instead, remained unaltered, controlled, confident [...]. (ibid, 132)

The writer embodies the function of Nemesis, proving not to suffer at all the personality of the interviewees (people like Kissinger, General Giap, Golda Meir, Arafat, Hailè Selassiè, Gaddafi): it is, indeed, their stature to stimulate the comparison. From this point of view, the title chosen for the first great cycle of "Fallaci interviews", *Intervista con la storia* (Fallaci 2014), underlines very well the writer's great ambition to become a privileged witness of her time. Her only "anxiety from influence" (Bloom 2018) is about History.

For this reason I like journalism. For this reason I fear journalism. What other profession allows you to write history at the very moment it happens and also to be its direct witness? Journalism is an extraordinary and terrible privilege. Not by chance, if you are aware of it, does it consume you with a hundred feelings of inadequacy. Not by chance, when I find myself going through an event or an important encounter, does it seize me like anguish, a fear of not having enough eyes and enough ears and enough brains to look and listen and understand like a worm hidden in the wood of history. (Fallaci 2014b: 11)

The interviewer feels a precise responsibility towards readers: when she cannot find the "*ubi consistam*" – the key to the psychology of the interviewees – Fallaci does not hide her frustration. This happens with Henry Kissinger, the historic US Secretary of State, who seems to the writer an elusive and indecipherable personality, a real sphinx:

- I'm sure that you too have a theory about the reasons for my popularity.
- I'm not sure. Dr. Kissinger. I'm looking for one through this interview. And I don't find it. (ibid, 18).

On the other hand, the writer feels an immediate empathy towards the Israeli leader Golda Meir, determined – says the writer – by her physical resemblance to Fallaci's mother Tosca

The last time I saw her she was wearing a sky-blue pleated blouse, with a pearl necklace. Stroking it with her short, pink-manicured nails, she seemed to be asking, "So do I look all right?" And I thought, a pity she's in power, a pity she's on the side of those who command. In a woman like this, power is an error in taste. (ibid, 220)

In the case of Gaddafi and Arafat, Fallaci openly expresses her repulsion by highlighting the disturbing or even "monstrous" traits of the interviewees. The former is described bluntly as a maniac, while the Palestinian leader is depicted as an ambiguous man and a liar. Fallaci's dislike can be so extreme to end up in the "character assassination" (Aricò 2010: 129; Scheer 1981), as General Sharon reproaches her for.

Miss Fallaci, you're so good at painting a treacherous portrait of me that for a minute I thought you were giving an interview about Sharon, not me. And yet you know very well that the image of a man rarely corresponds to that of the newspapers. You know that once a slander is launched, a lie invented, it is repeated and copied, finally accepted as truth. (Fallaci 2010: 193)

As in a play, writing is not entirely adherent to the factual reality, but is its sign, its "image". The writer has no difficulty in admitting that she processes her notes creatively, like a director who edits his film, using the "poetic scissors" (Eisenstein 1926; Taylor and Christie 1988). Revealing its own mechanisms, the interview is also a *textural* process: everything that once would have been considered *off the records* and therefore would have been kept "secret", now becomes an integral part of the text. The interview is also, in a metatextual way, its own genesis: there is no need to emphasize how this idea suits the logic and the aesthetic-productive context of contemporary culture and mass society. The form of the interview reveals a "pop taste" for seriality that does not spoil its "unique-piece" aura thanks to the authorial stance that lies behind it – the "brand" Fallaci.

3 Affinities and differences between Oriana Fallaci and Curzio Malaparte

The "portraits" obtained through the interviews form a sort of gallery *de viris illustribus* and, if many of the immortalized personalities are no longer familiar to today's audience, the artisan talent in creating vivid, still speaking pictures remains clearly visible. The journalist probably "inherits" this characteristic from another great Tuscan writer, Curzio Malaparte, whom she met in her youth thanks to her uncle Bruno (De Stefano 2013: 177). Fallaci's novels are strongly influenced by Malaparte's writings: "Like him, she writes in an aggressive style that is never neutral, and like him, she describes violence and death in the crudest terms" (ibid, 178). The famous writer, says Fallaci,

would take me for walks in the Tuscan countryside and, like an oracle who studies the patterns of birds in flight, he would predict a glorious future for me. "You're like me, Oriana!" he would say, using the formal *lei*. "One day you will have tremendous success. But not in Italy, abroad. In Italy they will hate you as they hate me." "Why, Malaparte?" "Because in Italy, in order to be accepted, you have to be dead and buried beneath the cypress trees." (ibid, 178)

Fallaci and the "arcitaliano" (Guerri 2021) have many inclinations in common: the incorrigible individualism, the anarchist and libertarian vocation, the contrarian attitude, a taste for controversy and the coup de théâtre, qualities that are well reflected "in the taste of invention passed off as reality, in autobiographism and in the belief to be the best" (ibid, 252). Also Fallaci's ability to grasp the symptomatic and grotesque aspect of power seems filtered by books such as Tecnica del colpo di stato, Kaputt, La pelle (Malaparte 1997), in which the writer was able to render the character of some great protagonists of history, from Lenin to Mussolini, from Napoleon to Himmler, with remarkable effectiveness. In the long prologue to the interview with Khomeini at some point we read: "The enemies of the revolution are everywhere', sentenced Salami while chasing away the hen that had come to peck his foot" (Fallaci 2010: 201); we find the same humorous tone in the merciless, caricatural portrait of the Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie, described as a withered old man obsessed with his *chihuahuas*. Fallaci's multilingual vocation also falls within this strategy of "comic lowering": the writer, like Malaparte, loves to "inlay [the] books in several foreign languages" (Fabrizi 2014: 63) and very often stuffing prose with regionalisms and slang expressions which are sometimes unexpectedly "put in the mouth" of international personalities: the Shah of Persia. for example, at a certain point says an improbable "sinistrorsi" [left electors], while Lech Walesa exclaims "le fo un esempio" [I'll do an example] (Fallaci 2010: 230). One of the writer's favorite strategies is to demystify the powerful of the Earth, ridiculing them without indulgence.

There is a gap in the essays on power: they don't consider its comedy. [...] historians and political scientists always forget to point out the ridiculous aspects of the inevitable monster. In short, they always regard the power as a serious matter and never as a ridiculous thing, they always tell it in terms of tragedy and never of comedy. [...] But to overcome that fear, that need to bow the head, that laziness, that resignation, it would be enough to look at them with the eyes of the child who in Andersen's fairy tale points his index finger and yells: "The king is naked!". [...] As far as I'm concerned, I've always observed them like this, sometimes even imagining them without underwear or in very embarrassing circumstances. (Fallaci 2014: 18)

Like Malaparte, Fallaci has a pessimistic view of history, oriented towards distrust and often contempt for the powerful; whereas, however, the former flaunts a sardonic, ironic-skeptical attitude, like an unrepentant dandy, Fallaci instead likes to represent herself as an indignant, a rebel, a *pasionaria*. After all, "every writer is an anarchist. Even when taking conservative positions. And he is anarchist as an exasperated interpreter of individualism, as an enemy of any canonized ideology, of any fanaticism, as a living refusal of any oppression, any imposition, any dog-

ma" (Fallaci 2014: 20). The writer is transgressive by statute because his job is to escape authority, dogmas, *diktats*, or the closed, prescribed word. In the prologue of *Intervista con la storia*, the writer confesses to readers:

And listen: for me the most beautiful monument to human dignity is still the one I saw on a hill in the Peloponnesus. It was not a statue, it was not a flag, but three letters that in Greek signify No: oxi. Men thirsting for freedom had written them among the trees during the Nazi-Fascist occupation, and for thirty years that No had remained there, unfaded by the sun or rain. Then the colonels had obliterated it with a stroke of whitewash. But immediately, almost magically, the sun and rain had dissolved the whitewash. So that day by day the three letters reappeared on the surface, stubborn, desperate, indelible. (Fallaci 2014b: 12)

Fallaci's dramatic conception of writing, literature and engagement is also similar to late Pasolini's attitude: she is convinced it is a creative, critical, "instinctive" practice that is capable of undermining power, which is by its nature ambiguous and obscurantist. What makes it possible to compare Oriana Fallaci to Pasolini is her ability to carry out the profession of writer with "instinct before logic", exercising "that particular type of intelligence which is then intuition, imagination, is a search for truth". That's "not the judge's truth [but] the truths that serve to understand life, therefore to make it a little more decent, a little more dignified, a little more bearable" (Fallaci 2014: 165): like the "corsaro" says in *Il romanzo delle stra*gi, "I know. But I have no proof" (Pasolini, 2015a). Without this research, Fallaci argues again, "we writers cannot function because we lack the main ingredient in our cuisine" (Fallaci 2014: 168). This is because writing – she summarizes – it is always a "political act", "before, during and after the act of writing. Its nature is political, its purpose is political, its consequences are political. Always. With no way out" (ibid, 165): whoever does not take this into account – she warns – is nothing more than "an obedient employee", a "merchant of words", a "courtier" who writes "in bad faith to keep the world as it is" (ibid, 165). In this sense, the closing of the conference held in Buenos Aires in 1983 follows one of the concluding passages of the speech that Pier Paolo Pasolini should have read at the Congress of the Radical Party in November 1975 (Pasolini 2015b), if he had not been assassinated in Ostia some days earlier.⁴ The intervention recalls once again, with the umpteenth variant, the metaphor of the intellectual who stings like the most tenacious of mosquitoes.

So I will conclude with a question and an answer. The question is: but then, what is left for you writers to do, except write? The answer is what we have always done, what we know how to do, what we come into the world for and live for. Telling life and therefore the truth without fear, without ever giving up. Anticipating events, provoking them, participating in history by denouncing, condemning, preaching. Being uncomfortable, having the courage to be uncomfortable, regardless of being

³ Rather than the Barthesian duality *écrivain-écrivants* (Barthes 2012), it seems more akin to the sensibility of Oriana Fallaci the reference to the accusation of "cowardice" made by Pasolini to many writers and journalists of his time, who renounce their critical and denunciatory function "by pocketing an invisible membership card" (Pasolini 2015: 126).

⁴ Fallaci investigated the murder of Pasolini as a freelance together with Alekos Panagulis (Fallaci and Cannavò 2022).

blackmailed, intimidated, punished; always intervening like a mosquito that bites and pinches. [...] And thus setting in motion another change: in an endless process, in a role of eternal pain in the ass. And so be it if we lose. So be it if we end up hanged. (Fallaci 2014: 120-121)

For these reasons, Fallaci seems to place herself, for psychological characteristics even before intellectual and aesthetical ones – above all, the role of the writer as the main character, a certain taste of invention, the combination of fiction and non-fiction, the tendency to autofiction (Doubrovsky 1977; Grell 2013; Marchese 2015) – on an ideal guideline that goes from Malaparte to Pasolini (and today, perhaps to an author like Roberto Saviano) (Altamura 2021: 407-408). But, in our view, she has neither the expressiveness of the former, nor the civil tension and poetic consistency of the latter. In this sense, the neocon radicalism fiercely advocated by Fallaci in the last years of her life (with its stubborn tendency towards ideological simplification, the incomprehensible renunciation of complexity, the angry claim to identify in Islam a sort of Hobbesian bogeyman) (Fallaci 2001, 2004, 2004b, 2010, 2015, 2016, 2021) is a demonstration of her peculiar attitude: it is homologous, in some ways, to late Pasolini's obsession for neofascism and consumerism, but, however, while Pasolini's criticism is a sharp and poetic analysis of the power, Fallaci's invective against Islam sounds frankly rigid and rhetorical. It is, maybe, the scleroticisation of a tendency which, in nuce, is already present in the pre-9/11 Fallaci:⁵

to think through enemies, using enemies as a means of knowledge, like a particular type of lamp, an electric torch that illuminates obliquely the reality towards which we direct it. It means developing a vision of the problem using the Enemy, the Enemy as a compass. One thinks "*per inimicos*" by transferring the focus of attention from the question before us in its specific objective dimension to what the Enemy [...] could do or think to gain an advantage. (Bosetti 2005: 49)

4 Conclusions: Fallaci as a "midcult" writer

In conclusion, the evaluation of Fallaci's production should pass through the impure, hybrid categories of gesture and performance, taking into account the close interdependence between the textual values and the author's "image" – an integration that is typical, moreover, of many forms of contemporary art. It is difficult to read a text by Fallaci without imagining her hoarse voice, her proud face, her *silhouette*, that is, leaving aside her "body". Perhaps her writing lacks an aesthetic autonomy that would be able to transcend news, history, ultimately subjective experience, and to express "universal" values. Of course, we cannot deny a place of absolute importance to Oriana Fallaci in the culture of the second half of the twentieth century and the early 2000s. However, her dimension seems to refer rather

⁵ On the ideological and radical instances of the late Fallaci, on their origin and implications, the bibliography is now extensive and still in progress. We indicate some volumes: A. Gnocchi, *I nemici di Oriana: la Fallaci, l'islam e il politicamente corretto*, Melville, Siena, 2019; R. Nencini, *Oriana Fallaci: morirò in piedi*, Polistampa, Firenze, 2007; R. Mazzoni, *Grazie Oriana: vita, battaglie e morte dopo l'11 settembre*, Società Toscana di Edizioni, Firenze, 2006; M. Allam, *Io e Oriana*, Magic Press, Roma, 2016.

to the category of "midcult" (Macdonald 2018), i.e. a cultural typology based on the late or postmodern re-use of ideas, resources, languages from high culture, but not always endowed with intrinsic originality and innovativeness. Net of all this, Fallaci's writing is still an admirable example of how it is possible (even at the cost of some contradictions) to combine the ethical values of journalistic-literary testimony with the codes of mass spectacularity, guaranteeing a productivity which, however, does not limit the quality standard of the work.

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