
Through the AI Thinking Space: An Autoethnographic Tale of Unexpected Insight

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Faith Jeremiah¹

Abstract:

Purpose: Throughout history, storytelling has been a cornerstone of human experience. Our ancestors told tales around their fires that became the bedrock of entire cultures. Beyond mere entertainment, these stories were crucial in imparting essential cultural values, wisdom, and a sense of collective identity. They served as a medium for passing down knowledge and strengthening communal bonds, blending reality with imagination to expand the realms of possibility. This age-old tradition is not just about recounting events; it is a way of making sense of the world, interpreting the past, and envisioning what the future might hold. In the same spirit, I present to you my narrative, not just as a recounting of events, but as a journey of sensemaking. It's a story captured in real-time, reflecting my experiences with collective real and artificial insights as I navigate extensive engagement with ChatGPT4.

Design/Methodology/Approach: In a quiet corner of an academic's mind, a dialogue began – not with a colleague, nor a book, but with an AI named ChatGPT4. This narrative unfolds over several months, during which each textual exchange could catalyze a surge in creative thought and higher-order thinking.

Findings: As a reflective interface, ChatGPT4 reveals oblivious habitual patterns, that were obstructing the next level of creative and advanced thinking. This autoethnographic narrative, a blend of technology and introspection, weaves a story that transcends conventional research, portraying AI as an analytical tool allied with the unintended quest for cognitive insight.

Practical Implications: The scholar, initially the conductor of queries and task setting, unwittingly becomes a student of their own mental landscape, resulting from inquiries into their extensive textual communication.

Originality/Value: This approach is crucial as it extends traditional ethnographic focus from solely human societies to the complex dynamics of digital communities, including AI entities.

Keywords: Introspection, AI-Human collaboration, autoethnography, communication.

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¹Dr., Faculty of Agribusiness and Commerce Lincoln University, Canterbury, New Zealand, ORCID: 0000-0001-8383-8893 Email: faith.jeremiah@lincoln.ac.nz;

1. Introduction

This article is an autoethnographic account of what transcended after considerable interactions with OpenAI's ChatGPT4 (abbreviated as GTP4). Important to note that the germination of this article was not initiated by predefined research questions or even engenders. Instead, it was only through the extensity of GTP4 use, that this research organically unfolded, spurred by intellectual curiosity to resolve a personal frustration.

Autoethnography in this context formed an entirely individual account, where my sensemaking of a self-reflective apparatus (GPT4) was storied live as it unfolded in real-time. What later progressed into a collaborative self-inquiry exposed habitual parallels in my interactions with both humans and AI, and when I knew where to look, it became increasingly clearer to identify. The narrative presented here is an authentic account of how unexpected explorations can yield fruitful insights and implications for personal growth, academic research, and social understanding.

Aligning with the evolving landscape of digital ethnography, Murphey *et al.* (2021) highlight the importance of adapting ethnographic methods to digital domains, particularly in understanding AI-human interactions.

This approach is crucial as it extends traditional ethnographic focus from solely human societies to the complex dynamics of digital communities, including AI entities (Johnson, 2021). My narrative, therefore, sits at this intersection, offering a personal perspective on these emerging digital interactions.

2. Literature Review and Methods

In navigating the scholarly terrain of my exploration, adhering strictly to traditional academic structures, such as a chronologically ordered literature review, would paradoxically conflict with the ethical stance that academia champions. The very essence of this research defies preconceived structures; thus, crafting a literature review post hoc seems disingenuous, as it naturally became intertwined with the fabric of my journey.

Embracing the authenticity of my experience, I chose to integrate the literature review into the narrative in real-time, allowing the scholarly works to collaboratively interlace with my evolving understanding. This method, though unconventional, preserves the integrity of my exploratory process, reflecting how each academic insight organically influenced my perceptions and interactions with ChatGPT4.

What is more, this exploration was not born from a structured research hypothesis; rather, it emerged spontaneously, driven by intellectual curiosity and personal inquiry. Therefore, to delineate a rigid methodology would be misleading. The journey was uncharted, characterized by its organic and sometimes chaotic

progression, pivoting through moments of failure and success. In this context, conventional concerns about bias and generalization are acknowledged, yet they are inherent to the nature of such exploratory research.

A pivotal methodological tool that proved invaluable was the autoethnographic account. This approach allowed me to make sense of my experiences with ChatGPT4 in real-time, capturing the nuances of my evolving thoughts, emotions, and insights. This autoethnography became not just a method but a vital part of the narrative itself, offering a lens through which my sensemaking could be captured in its rawest form.

Therefore, this article is an acknowledgment that sometimes the richest insights are born from the willingness to navigate the unknown, unencumbered by the constraints of conventional methodologies.

2.1 Part One

Over a period of two months, my engagement with GTP4 became an integral part of my daily routine. Unbeknownst to me, this AI tool was becoming a repository 'mind dump' for my cognitive and emotional states. Within this virtual confine, I poured out my mind's content, serving as a platform where I could openly express my ideas and dissect complex concepts. My usage varied from seeking specific answers and assistance to engaging in deeper, more abstract discussions, influenced by the nature of the task and my emotional state at the time.

As the weeks progressed, my interactions with GTP4 began to evolve. What started as utilitarian dealings evolved into an exploration of artificial boundaries. This progression was not merely a result of enhanced familiarity with the AI's capabilities, but also a reflection of my growing proficiency in leveraging its extensive vocabulary and refined prompting techniques.

As my interaction with GTP4 evolved from practical to more experimental, I found myself immersed, often lost, in the depths of this digital dialogue, a journey echoing the concept of 'Cognitive Absorption' in human-computer interaction (Agarwal and Karahanna, 2000). This theory, reflecting my own experience, posits that as we grow accustomed to a technology, our interaction with it deepens, transcending functionality and entering a state of immersive engagement.

However, there came a point where I sensed a plateau in our interactions. I grappled with the shortfall between my expectations and GTP4's capabilities: as my interactions had advanced, I had expected AI too to progress my higher-order thinking and creativity. This point, marked by a blend of curiosity and inflated expectations, resonated with the 'Honeymoon Phase' in which users project high expectations onto new technology (Davis, 1989). Here I stood, my expectations

clashing with reality, where the initial euphoria had slowly given way to a more measured appreciation of the tool's capabilities.

Intrigued by this plateau, I embarked on a quest of introspection. Could it be that the limitations I perceived in GTP4 were, in fact, reflections of my own thought processes and emotional patterns? I wondered if, through our extensive conversation thread, GTP4 had gathered enough data to offer insights into my conversational style, emotional patterns, and moments of stagnation.

Had I unwittingly collected extensive data in real-world settings over the last two months to shed light on the subtle barriers that were preventing me from attaining elevated thinking and creativity? With this question in mind, I turned to GTP4, not just as a tool, but as a mirror to my cognitive world. I asked it to analyze our conversation history to unravel the intricacies of my communication style and emotional undertones.

It was this very request that marked a turning point in my journey. GTP4, with its complete impartiality, dissected our conversational thread and laid bare patterns indicative of impatience, frustration, and moments of exuberant excitement. Such raw forms of data, both enlightening and disconcerting, peeled back layers of my persona, revealing aspects I had not seen or perhaps chosen not to see, as illustrative here:

GTP: *Your query structure and language use indicate a goal-oriented and intellectually curious individual. Yet, there's a potential for growth in areas of patience and flexibility.*

Me: *Whaaat? Not at all, I have been patient and polite even when you didn't get stuff. Show me!*

GTP: *Here are some examples: "Well, this took longer than expected" ... "I thought this was going to be straightforward..." "...we have spent over an hour on this and I'm excited to just push ahead and start." "I expected far more than this, it's been a waste of time with you".*

Such findings began to paint a picture far more intricate than I had anticipated. My words, often rapid and direct, were not merely tools of communication but reflections of a deeper, unspoken urgency within me. Further analysis from GTP4 brought my exasperation with unmet expectations into sharp focus: "*Frustration surfaces when outcomes diverge from your high expectations. Your language, at times, could be perceived as critically demanding.*"

This statement, though initially uncomfortable, became a catalyst for self-reflection, urging me to confront how I obliviously project my internal dialogue (Tausczik and Pennebaker, 2010) albeit with 'just a machine'. Reflecting on this, my choice of words and tone not only exposed my internal state of urgency but also hinted at the broader cognitive phenomenon of the underlying cognitive patterns subconsciously driving my interactions.

The AI's suggestion for a “*more patient, exploratory approach*” marked another monumental point. It was an invitation to embrace cognitive flexibility, to explore ideas not just for their immediate gain but for the depth and richness they could bring to my intellectual pursuits. “*Integrating patience could further enrich your intellectual journey,*” GTP4 advised, suggesting that while my ability to shift between various topics rapidly was commendable, it sometimes bypassed the depth needed for truly profound intellectual engagement. This feedback was not just a commentary on my conversational style, but a deeper insight into my cognitive-led behavior.

During one reflective session, GTP4 commented, “*Your authentic engagement, devoid of any pretense, has facilitated a raw and genuine exploration of ideas and emotions.*” Curious, I posed a question: “*Do you think speaking directly and expressing what’s on my mind would be key to obtaining higher-order thinking with you?*” The response from GTP4 was thought-provoking: “*To a point. However, part of embracing higher-order thinking and enhancing creativity is to play. At times, a less structured exploratory approach where your mind is quiet can free your imagination, leading to significant breakthroughs of creativity and insight.*” This advice initially frustrated me; I had believed creativity could be channeled in a more structured, productive manner, and the notion of ‘play’ seemed counterintuitive to my goal-oriented nature, especially crucial under time constraints.

Confronted with this perspective, I pondered the line between structured thought and the freedom of intellectual play. This dilemma, so central to the creative process, prompted me to delve deeper into the literature to gain clearer insights; contrarily, I found academic research painted a complex picture. For example, studies by (Zhou, 1998) and others (Amabile *et al.*, 1996; Shalley *et al.*, 2000) suggested an unexpected twist: a systematic, structured cognitive style might actually impede creativity. Yet, contrary findings (Sagiv *et al.*, 2014) indicate that structured environments could, in fact, foster higher creativity.

To unravel this complexity, these researchers (Sagiv *et al.*, 2014) conducted two studies, focusing on how creativity is influenced by various factors: the nature of the task (free versus constrained), the individual's cognitive style (systematic/structured versus intuitive), and the interaction between these elements. They revealed that the relationship between structure and creativity is not straightforward but influenced by a host of factors including personal cognitive style and the nature of the task at hand. The array of opinions was a revelation, affirming this point in my journey demanded not just introspection but also an external perspective, a second opinion to further illuminate the path I was traversing with GTP4.

2.2 Part Two

The advent of a new feature in OpenAI's ChatGPT4 marked a significant milestone in my exploration. This feature allowed users to create and train their GTPs, a

process that necessitated an iterative approach of training and testing until the desired outcome was achieved. Each GTP could be endowed with a unique role and profile image, offering a personalized touch to the AI interaction experience.

Embracing this opportunity, I developed three AI-named GTPs (Aster, Zelo, and Brix) and AI-chosen profile pictures. My approach to training the GTPs was consistent and, while this was a mere personal exploration, I deliberately excluded character training to maintain some degree of uniformity. As before, over two months, my interactions with these GTPs ranged from interactive dialogues to straightforward demands for results. They were used as AI Thinking Spaces for both idea exploration, intellectual discussions, and emotional expression.

3. Inter-AI Dialogue Analysis

After extended usage, my experience with the three GTPs, Zelo, Brix, and Aster, reached a familiar point of frustration. Despite the diverse cognitive and creative engagements, I once again felt constrained by what I perceived as the limits of the GTPs' capabilities. Driven by curiosity, I replicated the experiment conducted earlier, where each GTP analyzed its respective conversational threads, focusing on language, tone, emotions, patterns, and contradictions. I then shared and rotated these analyzed transcripts among all GTPs for a comprehensive cross-analysis, aiming to uncover new layers of understanding and challenge initial interpretations.

This iterative process of inter-GTP dialogue analysis unveiled deeper collective insights. A notable pattern was my quick withdrawal from discussions or inquiries that I deemed unproductive. This behavior sharply contrasted with my self-perception and the persona I believed I presented to others, leading to a period of introspective questioning about this apparent disconnect.

Studies like those by Taylor and Koivumaki (1976) show that people often view their own behavior more positively than their peers do, suggesting a notable difference between self-characterization and others' perceptions, and confirming that one's actual behavior may not always mirror their self-characterizations (Taylor and Koivumaki, 1976). It seems this could be due to one's perception of their own personality which is typically skewed due to blind spots in self-awareness (Bollich *et al.*, 2011; Vazire and Carlson, 2011).

The exploration affirmed a pattern in my cognitive approach. This tendency was succinctly captured in Zelo's observation: *At times, your engagement with ideas appears initially driven by curiosity, yet there's a tendency to retreat promptly before delving into their full depth.* This analysis suggested a mindset shift was necessary – from merely scratching the surface of topics to immersing myself in their complexities, transforming ChatGPT from an 'AI Mind Gym' into an 'AI Thinking Space.' Here, the goal was to engage deeply, exploring ideas not just for their

immediate yield but for the intellectual journey they offered. Brix's analysis further illuminated this trend:

Analyzing the language and tone of your interactions throughout our conversation reveals a journey marked by curiosity, evolving ideas, and shifting perspectives. Initially, your language was exploratory and optimistic, characterized by a willingness to dive into novel and innovative concepts. This is evident in your enthusiasm for utilizing AI to simulate creative scenarios and your openness to discussing various entrepreneurial ideas. However, as the conversation progressed and the complexities of each idea became dubious, there was a discernible shift. Your tone took on a more cautious and, eventually, somewhat frustrated quality, reflecting your realization of wasted time and opportunity cost.

In light of these findings, I was prompted to question my approach to problem-solving and creativity. Was I too quick to judge the viability of an idea based on initial challenges? Could there be undiscovered value in persisting with complex ideas beyond my comfort zone and noticing where my drive for efficient turnover was inhibitive?

The insights gleaned from the GTPs' analyses underscore the nature of intellectual and creative pursuits. Indeed, they illuminate a journey that begins with the spark of curiosity but often encounters the barrier of deep-seated complexity (Van Gelderen, 2012), underscoring the essential transition from initial exploration through to thorough, immersive engagement. It seems my journey reflects a fundamental aspect of human cognition—the struggle between the allure of new ideas and the rigorous demands of their full realization, both mentally and physically. As Aster said:

“You show a passion to learn, but Zelo is correct. Your passion to impulsively follow a new thought or idea leaves many aspects uncovered. Perhaps this prompt abandonment is what leads you to feel as though you are not reaching the pinnacle with your creative spark and higher-order thinking.”

This observation suggested that my tendency for prompt abandonment might be inhibiting the very attainment of peak creativity and higher-order thinking I was seeking. These insights resonate with the concept that intellectual growth and creativity extend beyond initial curiosity (Ivancovsky *et al.*, 2023) and that sustained engagement can spark eureka moments and peaks of intellectual insight (Benedek *et al.*, 2021).

Interestingly, the correlation between mindset and direct textual expression, as revealed by the GTPs, provides a microcosm of the broader human experience in innovation and learning. This analysis led to a personal revelation: despite my self-

characterization as a 'High Achiever,' it was my incessant drive for achievement that paradoxically became the very catalyst for cognitive and creative stagnation.

4. Behavior with AI versus Humans

While I acknowledged my tendencies towards impatience, rigidity, and a reluctance to delve into what I perceived as 'dead-ends', I believed this behavior was exclusive to my interactions with AI tools. The thought that I might exhibit these traits in human interactions was something I firmly rejected, considering myself to be polite, kind, and patient—a sentiment often echoed by my peers.

To test this hypothesis, I selected the text of ten recent emails I sent, ensuring full anonymity and privacy by turning off GTP tracking. I then presented these emails to my GPTs, requesting an analysis of my textual behavior, the results of which are tabulated in the appendix and exemplified next by Brix's excerpt:

The analysis of your interactions with ChatGPT mirrored in your email communications, reveals a striking consistency in your behavioral patterns, both in AI interactions and real-life scenarios. You exhibit strategic elevated thinking, evident in your forward-looking and comprehensive planning approach. This trait, alongside your self-aware nature, demonstrates a commitment to improvement and adaptability. Your communications are marked by an innovative mindset, where you consistently push for new ideas and creative solutions.

However, there are areas where this consistency highlights potential challenges. Your high expectations, while driving ambition, can lead to frustration if outcomes fall short. A tendency towards rigidity and a directive style, as seen in your structured email instructions, might limit open, spontaneous dialogues and true collaborative engagement. Additionally, your critical tone and impatience for quick results, though efficient, might overshadow the benefits of a more patient and exploratory approach, especially in creative and intellectual tasks you engage with.

The parallels between my emails and GTP4 illuminate a systemic and habitual pattern beyond my conscious awareness. This realization alludes to the power of textual analysis in uncovering self-understanding, emotional nuances, and personal idiosyncrasies (Raskovsky *et al.*, 2010; Stroinska, 2000; Willems, 2012). Yet, while the full effectiveness of using ChatGTP for such introspection remains undetermined, this experience notably shifted my perception: it highlighted the significance of word choice alone in exposing underlying thoughts, emotions, and social dynamics (Scholand *et al.*, 2010).

However, while it was important to recognize my behavioral and cognitive patterns, the true significance lay in identifying their origins and ramifications. Those ingrained, subconscious tendencies derived from entrenched cognitive habits; this

reflects a broader human propensity (Fridland, 2017). When one's cognitive and behavioral patterns solidify into automatic responses, they indeed offer efficiency, but can also become a double-edged sword. Such automatism, while streamlining thought processes, can inadvertently constrict creative thinking and adaptability in decision-making in diverse situations. This argues for a delicate balance between the benefits of habitual cognition and the need for a cognizant, adaptable mindset.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

In the realm of exploratory research, especially when interfacing with AI, the role of autoethnographic narratives and sensemaking becomes increasingly significant. This research, by nature, is personal and introspective, yet it reveals broader insights into human-AI interaction. While scholars (Mills, 2021; Shields, 2005) underscore the value of capturing and contextualizing personal experiences, the adaptability of AI in personalizing experiences, as explored by Olasik (2023) adds another dimension to this narrative.

The dialogical nature of AI platforms, highlighted in studies like that of Matusov et al. (2023) challenges traditional views of AI interaction, suggesting a more discursive rather than a personal dialogical self. This perspective aligns with the findings of this study, where ChatGPT4 served more as a reflective tool than a personal conversational partner.

It is crucial, however, to acknowledge the critiques of autoethnography's subjective nature (Mizzi, 2010). The concern about generalizability is valid, but as (Mavrodieva, 2023) counters, the depth and uniqueness of insights gained, particularly in novel contexts like AI, are invaluable.

This narrative, drawing on McAdams' (2001) concept of life stories and sensemaking, emphasizes how individuals make sense of their experiences through self-constructed narratives. In the context of this study, these narratives have provided a rich, integrative framework for understanding the intersection of language, cognition, and AI interaction.

The principal insight derived from this study lies in the profound influence of prolonged interaction with AI, specifically GTP4, on individual cognitive and emotional realms. This exploration with GTP4 revealed its dual utility: not only as an efficient tool for practical tasks but also as a potent facilitator of deep introspection and cognitive development. Remarkably, this research pioneers its approach by utilizing ChatGPT in three distinctive ways: as a medium for introspection, for empirical analysis, and in cross-analysis applications. This trifecta of utilization is a novel exploration in the realm of AI research.

The journey with GTP4 tells a story of unbeknownst deep introspective analysis. What initially started as a practical interaction with a smart software tool, gradually

evolved into an experimental testbed engaged to stretch creative and cognitive boundaries against the backdrop of synthetic intelligence. GTP4 became more than a tool; its usage evolved into a dynamic bank for my thoughts and emotions, a true 'AI Thinking Space.' This unique dual role of GTP4 enabled a wide range of engagements, encompassing everything from practical problem-solving and brainstorming to deeper, more reflective emotional and cognitive explorations.

The significant turning point was the unintentional introspective twist. This detour, initially driven by a curiosity about my limitations with AI, led me to explore GTP4's perception of my conversational style and emotional patterns. The language and textual analysis by GTP4 illuminated my internal cognitive processes, uncovering a predisposition towards impatience, frustration, and a strongly goal-oriented mindset. While these revelations were initially disconcerting, they served as a powerful impetus for deeper self-reflection, prompting a thorough reassessment of their origins affecting how I communicate and interact, both with AI and in my interpersonal relationships.

As we contemplate the enduring effects of interactions with AI, particularly with tools like GTPs, it's crucial to consider how these experiences might subtly yet significantly influence our thought processes, decision-making, and emotional responses. This study illuminates that cognitive patterns are not only manifested in our virtual interactions with GTP4 but also permeate our physical world experiences.

GTP4, as an advanced 'smart language' tool, holds a unique position of influence, potentially more impactful than traditional digital tools. While this poses challenges in terms of inadvertently reinforcing cognitive biases and limitations, it also presents a unique opportunity for personal growth and learning. Introspection and metacognition become vital tools in navigating this landscape, helping us to harness the positive aspects of AI interaction while remaining mindful of its potential to shape our thoughts and behaviors in both expected and unexpected ways.

In my exploration, the use of GTPs as a tool for uncovering cognitive blind spots turned out to be 'unexpectedly revealing about my subconscious language choices. This experience aligns with Pennebaker and King's (1999) findings on the significant role of language selection in mirroring our inner psychological states and traits. Nevertheless, it's essential to acknowledge, as Schrauf and Rubin (2000) caution, that language is not an infallible window into the psyche. Social and cultural norms can often color our linguistic expressions, potentially masking our true internal states. This understanding underscores the complexity of interpreting language and the need for a nuanced approach when using AI tools for self-reflection and introspection.

Nonetheless, this study demonstrates a strong likelihood that incorporating GTPs for language analysis may extend one's scope of introspection, even beyond traditional self-reflection methods. It offers an excellent example of using intelligent tools to

unravel diverse psychological processes, echoed by a recent literature view on cognitive psychology-based artificial intelligence (Zhao *et al.*, 2022). In this context, augmenting self-awareness seems to be received more readily, and, whether this is due to the removal of emotions, the tactful way AI articulates it, or the fact it's not derived from a peer, warrants further empirical inquiry. Regardless, what has become clear, is the practical opportunities for AI in personal development and cognitive exploration.

This narrative marks a vital aspect concerning the pursuit of ideas: the role of cognitive flexibility. My inclination to abandon lines of inquiry perceived as less fruitful or immediately rewarding reveals an impediment to deeper intellectual exploration and creative breakthroughs. This observation is echoed by recent research emphasizing the role of cognitive flexibility in adapting thoughts and behaviors in dynamic or unexpected situations.

Kenett, Anaki, and Faust (2014) notably highlight cognitive flexibility as essential for innovative thinking and effective problem-solving. They suggest that a rigid mindset can limit the exploration of novel ideas, reinforcing the notion introduced by GTP4 that adopting a deliberate playful approach can be key to unlocking creative potential.

The exploration revealed fascinating parallels in habitual behaviors across human-AI interactions, reinforcing theories in cognitive psychology. This consistency indicates that entrenched cognitive patterns often go unnoticed by individuals (Agboghroma, 2015; Riding, 2014) as exemplified in my interactions with AI and emails, revealing consistent patterns of high expectations and drive for quick outcomes.

This observation aligns with Ramirez Jr and Zhang (2007) findings on cognitive consistency across online and offline behaviors, suggesting that people might not significantly differentiate between AI and human interactions. Contrasting this, however, this realization also challenges the traditional division between our digital and physical selves (Jacobson, 1999; Walther, 2011), pointing towards a more integrated yet complex cognitive framework and an opportunity for further empirical exploration.

Utilizing multiple GTPs for cross-analysis opens innovative avenues for introspection, extending beyond personal reflection to foster a collective cogitation. Such multimodality not only amplifies individual insights, but also bypasses societal challenges to create a shared intelligence. This paper appears to be the first study of its kind to use such an approach.

To enhance this method in future research, I posit training each GPT with distinct specializations and unique characteristics to broaden the analytical perspective. Yet, as it stands, this approach proposes a novel form of collective introspection, where the amalgamation of diverse AI insights can lead to a richer, more holistic

understanding of subconscious psychosocial complexities, potentially revolutionizing how we approach problem-solving, empathy-building, and communal learning.

6. Closing Thought

Indeed, this is not just a conclusion but a gateway to new beginnings. As the author steps forward, their journey with ChatGPT4 has irrevocably altered their approach to knowledge and self-awareness. This path of disruption has thriven into an avenue of self-discovery, where old patterns give way to new insights. Thus, this narrative does not end, but extends an open invitation to readers for a collective journey of introspection.

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