Narrativity and Audiovisual Performance: Meaning In The Narrative Experience.

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ABSTRACT

The digital artefacts, and the scope of audiovisual production in particular, bring new challenges to established theoretical concepts towards the construction of narrative works and the construction of meaning from experience. In this paper, we will look at the context of live audiovisual performance to understand how it permits a reflection and proposes to rethink the concept of narrativity in a larger sense. After a brief review on the fundamentals of narrative theory, from structuralism onwards, we will describe audiovisual performance as a practice within the wide context of the audiovisual, and in itself containing different approaches. The term audiovisual performance is described as flexible and as a territory of connection between different arts. Sustained on the two previous definitions we will analyse three cases that illustrate different manifestations of narrativity in audiovisual performance: Randomness - improvisation — remixing, Narrative as composition and Narrative as concept. The proposed examples, questioning narrativity, suggest a growing role of the viewer as a narrative producer.

KEYWORDS

Narrativity; Audiovisual; Performance; Experience; Post structuralist narrative theory; Reception.

1 | INTRODUCTION

As the scientific study of narrative structures, narratology flourished in the 1960s with the studies of Roland Barthes and Tzvetan Todorov in the systematisation of the various levels of narration from its micro-propositions to the macro-propositions. The studies developed within the framework of structural analysis were essential for the establishment of narratological studies as a scientific discipline, making it possible to provide a rigorous description of how narrative, or at least narrative structures, work. In fact, the emergence of scientific studies in Narratology coincided with Structuralism and was linked to the development of structural linguistics and other human sciences, in particular psychoanalysis, ethnology and anthropology, which, by various means, have emphasized the universal nature of narrativity and its essential role in the foundations of human nature and culture. At the same time, the development of narratology has assimilated and synthesized previous narrative theories, as for example, formalist studies on traditional tales. In fact, the establishment of narratology as an exhaustive study of the narrative rules exists because of the work of Vladimir Propp Morphology of the Folktale, published in 1928, which, based on the analysis of one hundred Russian tales, identified a narrative structure based on a set of fundamental agents and spheres of actions. This scheme was later simplified by Greimas, with the creation of an actantial model that breaks an action down into a set of six actants (human or non-human entities, moral values, etc.). This would be the skeleton of the story, which, from a structuralist perspective, would make it possible to

reduce the narrative to its most basic and elementary form, finding a basic structure that underlies the diversity of the narrative. In general, we can say that the narrative, in this perspective, is characterized by the existence of the enunciator of a narration (the narrator) who reports real or fictitious events that are located in a specific time and space, and describes the succession of states caused or suffered by certain agents (characters). This means that one of the main ingredients of the structuralist narrative is the story. the sequence of events. Other authors, such as Bremond (1966) and Adam (1985), developed theoretical considerations that made it possible to outline some conditions so that, from a structuralist approach, a story could be defined as a narrative. should a logical-semantic Firstly, there be relationship between functions and actors so that there can exist a narrative proposition. In other words. for there to be a coherent narrative text, the facts reported in the narrative proposition should be correlated in a chronological and logical way. At the same time, for a narrative to exist, a basic triadic structure must also be provided: a transformation between an initial situation or status and the final situation or status that functions as the conclusion of the narrative text.

Later on, poststructuralist perspectives affirmed themselves in opposition to previous ones. One of the observations against the structuralist approach was the fact that structuralist studies focused on classic narratives (nineteenth century, folktales, myths, etc.), and not on narratives that problematized narrative categories, as is the case of contemporary narratives. In contemporary audiovisual narrative -as in literaryit is possible to identify the dissolution of time, space, characters, the very notion of plot, the outcome; processes of genre hybridization, fragmentation of narrative entity (entities), contamination of narrative language with lyrical and dramatic potentialities, all of which question the traditional concept of narrative. An essential step to rethinking structuralist perspectives has been the idea that the narrative can sustain various forms of re-ordering while still remaining narrative. In particular, the relativisation of time as chronological sequentially has demonstrated that temporal order is not a distinctive feature of the narrative. For authors like Goodman (1978) and Paul Ricoeur (1990), the narrative reflects the way human beings experience and represent time, as well as their knowledge of reality, in a way that is not necessarily chronological. It is the case, for example, of authors who, focusing on the analysis of human passions from a mythical and sometimes cyclical conception of space, time and characters, completely annul temporal sequentiality. Narrative literary discourse itself is deconstructed and its fragmentation is exploited by using, for example, all kinds of records: newspaper clippings, letters, personal diaries, poems and photographs. We may observe a general tendency for the deconstruction and questioning of the narrative categories.

Another aspect that marks poststructuralist studies is the development of a narrative criticism applied to genres that are not exclusively verbal, such as the case of film criticism. In the last decades, narratology has adopted different types of approaches, which take into account the developments of several human and social sciences, such as Linguistics, Semiotics, Psychology, and has also considered the approach to new objects of reflection, such as the narrative elements in daily conversation, visual arts, music, videogames, etc., adopting interdisciplinary perspectives. The most recent perspectives focus less on the binarisms, classifications, or universal characteristics of narrative writing - even if this continues to be the basis of the analysis of narrative categories - than on narrative writing as a dynamic process involving an interpretive act. This is the case of the psychological and cognitive perspectives, which, stemming from the fusion between narratology and psychology studies, gave rise to studies centered on the relation between narration, memory and cognition. In these perspectives, focus is placed on reception. For authors like Prince (1982), the narrativity of a text is related to the way a text fulfils the reader's expectations, his thematic and horizon of narrativity. Moving away from the concept of narrativity as an explicit formal structure, in this perspective, narrativity is the result of the implicit sequentiality that is recreated individually, at a later time, when it organizes and gives meaning to the narrative experience. The narrative corresponds, at present, to a process of narrative organization, that is always unfinished and open.

2 | AUDIOVISUAL PERFORMANCE

Audiovisual combines sound and image in the production of a sensorial experience presented in a wide variety of contexts, such as cinema, television, video art and, in general, the digital media, from videogames to videoblogs. Although it is image that

defines ontologically cinema, Michel Chion (2008, 125) brings to the fore the sound in its relevance to cinematic experience. The fundamental understanding of the different connections between sound and image, following Chion, in the production for different media, is worth emphasize: while in cinema this connection is complex (sound is spoken, ambient. soundtrack), asynchronous, complementary correlation with the image, in television the correspondence is direct, it is, in certain respects, an illustrated radio since the spoken word is central to sound and image (Chion, 2008, 125). Video floats between cinema and the television free from restrains of both. In it, live captures combine with cinematic edition and extends further with the use of multiple screens (Chion, 2008, 128). It loosely establishes approximations with dance through the velocity in the editing and with text in the way it proposed to be seen not as contemplation but as fast as reading. The approximation to other arts, central to the video art, is made through the methodologies, modes and contexts of presentation. But it has been the creative use of technological through developments that the connection between sound and image has developed to the audiovisual performance of today.

Since the 1960s, with the advent of equipment for recording and manipulating sound and image - in particular, the portable video recorder and editing/synthesising equipment (among them the Paik / Abe synthesizer in 1969 and Rutt - Etra, in 1972) - artists have played an important role as researchers. Experiments with signal processing, generator of distortion, between sound and image, are central to the works of Steina and Woody Vasulka, Nam June Paik, among others. Within this scope, sound and image are both produced together and in response, with equipment that intermingles signals and goes beyond synesthesia, which is the interchange of intuitions or implicitness of musicality and visual sensorial forms. Aesthetically, it is the noise resultant from the distortion of what has been captured that conveys an abstract sequence. Throughout the following decades, the tools used by artists also served the audiovisual commercial market, namely cinema, television, design, and multimedia (Salter, 2010, 173). More recently, editing tools have been combined with those of information technology and have opened up the potential for experimentation with generative art works, notably those of Lia and Alba Corral. Through the continuous

sharing of digital technologies, audiovisual performance interplays with other art forms such as installation, immersive environments and public art, among others, and it is also part of multimedia projects.

To the understanding of liveness of audiovisual we have to consider the production process of capturing and editing or the possibility for generated images and sounds to shape the performance. Liveness is in the technological possibility for the creative process to occur in the presence of the audience. In the liveness of the audiovisual is thus necessary the performance of the artist. Cinema, says Gabriel Menotti (2008), has always been live. Menotti reminds us of the history of cinema, to the live music that accompanied silent cinema and the festive ambient among the audience, but also to the expanded cinema tradition from the 1950's onwards and the liquid light shows of the 1960's. The 1960's brought to the fore the action of the artists and their production process as art. The presence of the artists that creates images or sound or both is central to the event defined as performance with sound and image, that is, audiovisual performance. The performers may be absent from stage, in the case of light shows, VJing or Mapping shows, or their actions confined to the small movements in front of screens. The expressing body through movements is sometimes meaningless because it is due to their presence more than the actions during the event that define audiovisual performance.

The vast diversity of the works presented as audiovisual performance reveals, nonetheless, the difficulty in obtaining a fixed definition. It is important to note that definitions, especially those pertaining to artistic practices, are flexible, mutable. Consequently, than a flexible definition, audiovisual performance comprises a set of terms that appear to be fragmentary. Each of these terms is associated with designations such as "live cinema, performance cinema, synthetic cinema and audiovisual (a/v) performance," (Salter, 2010, 165) and to this list we may add VJing, visualism, visual music, expanded cinema, among other lesser-known terms. The relationship between the various terms is sometimes restricted to groups or territories, as for example, visualism and VJing (Fischer, in Carvalho and Lund, 2015, 109), at other times it identifies changes in the context. For instance, "live cinema" events are presented in spaces such as a gallery or a cinema;

and VJing, presented in clubs and parties. Others include, "expanded cinema" and "visual music", identified with historical periods. However, the various terms articulate in a dialogical way and are an expression of the term "audiovisual performance".

As for the relationship between audiovisual performance and narrativity, it may be used as a starting point Paul Mumford's (VJ Londoner) perspective, who relates his work as a VJ with the timeless activity of storytelling (Mumford in Lund and Lund, 2009, 158). This relationship has as its starting point the collection of stories for audiovisual performance within a model that combines discourse theory, hypermedia and meta-narrative. One of the peculiarities of VJing (the name that Paul Mumford gives to his work) is that it defines the visual part of an audiovisual performance. Therefore, VJing retains the visual side of a story and uses it as an element in the construction of the performance by improvising a dialogue in reaction to the DJ's music. The process of performance construction involves the capturing, cutting of films into pieces or clips, their transformation into autonomous objects and, finally, live manipulation. In this process, a kind of patchwork is constructed with its own meaning, created by means of repetition and recombination. As a result, performance is the telling of a story that, instead of using voice, results from multiple images and sounds combined. Narratives constructed this way follow a continuum from the cinematographic editing and transition to a live context, while taking advantage of the tools that make capturing, editing and real time editing possible. Within this scope, Mia Makela (artist and theorist who uses the term live cinema for her work) points out the differences between live cinema and cinema, comparing the non-linearity and absence of a story with actors (by means of dialogues and expressions) of the former with the linearity surrounding the construction of conflict among characters in the sense of a final resolution of the latter (Makela, 2006). This lack of plot and linearity, coupled with techniques and technologies proper to real time, identifies live cinema as a term that distances itself from the realm of cinema, inserting it into the audiovisual performance one. Another narrative strategy of the composition or structuring of a performance brings it closer to musicality. The impulsive and spontaneous attributes emerge as methods of choosing the order to give to the various clips in the course of the performance, bringing it closer to improvised music and, in particular, jazz improvisation, and learning by the continuous act of doing. But it is not only the technique that is learned until it becomes intuitive, it is also the accumulation of recorded experiences and the mixing in the course of the performances.

3 | NARRATIVITY AUDIOVISUAL PERFORMANCE

The audiovisual performance, as described above, makes us think the principles of narrativity in a larger conceived in a poststructuralist sense. perspective, despite the affinities that may exist between audiovisual performance and film narrative. Based on the analysis of some case studies, we intend to identify some of the elements that configure narrativity in audiovisual performance, taking into account its technological and communicative specificity. Some elements are transversal to the performances chosen for analysis. Visually, they are black and white works, with some hints of colour. Sound falls within the category of electronic music, although it resorts to instrumentalisation and the capturing of sounds. The information collected about the works is based on interviews with the artists who created the performances, their portfolios and videos on Vimeo.

3.1 RANDOMNESS – IMPROVISATION – REMIXING: PI REMIX (1.1.1) (2015), CAIO FAZOLIN

The first case study illustrates the ways in which the concepts of sequentiality, causality and temporality are replaced by randomness, improvisation and remixing in the audiovisual narrative.

The performance "Pi Remix (1.1.1)" (2015), by Caio Fazolin, presented at the event Arranjos Experimentais (Experimental Arrangements) event, at Paço das Artes, in São Paulo, addresses the theme mathematical patterns. As the name of the performance indicates, Pi Remix is a remix of the film "Pi" (1998) from director Darren Aronofsky, with the sound work of the artist Ryoji Ikeda. Both of these works address the theme of mathematical patterns that are equally common in performance. It is, therefore, an adaptation which, based on Aronofsky's hypotext, freely constructs a non-linear hypertext with an infinite number of paths and combination possibilities. As Mumford in Lund and Lund points out,

A hyper-narrative or meta-narrative is essentially a collection of small story pieces

designed to be arranged in many different ways or to tell many linear stories from different points of view and it follows the logic of a reverse deconstruction process. (Mumford in Lund and Lund, 2009, 158).

The collection and selection of audiovisual objects and the subsequent construction of a library is part of the creation and preparation process of the performance. The audio and visual objects that belong to this library are regrouped during the performance as if they were micro-stories:

A film can be broken down into scenes, which are larger pieces of broader strokes of meaning. Scenes can be broken further down into sequences, which are the result of the continuity on various planes including the temporal, spatial, and perceptual." (Mumford in Lund and Lund, 2009, 159).

As a result, the performance is visually similar to the original film, in black and white. The film, now cut into short clips, is reconstructed, reorganized and tells a new story, live, with the same character, but one which does not participate in the same filmic conflict. The performance Pi Remix (1.1.1), emphasizes the direct relationship with the film Fazolin based his work on, without resorting to image distortion. The proximity to original film source in the images is kept, and the approach to reality is also maintained. But instead of a conflict, the performance expresses an idea throughout the performance by resorting to remixing techniques. One part of the sound of the film is kept, in sync with the images, another part overlays, which is the sound by Ryoji Ikeda. The performance is a whole composed of sounds and images from different origins. However, sound, much more than the background sound that accompanies the performance.

is the element which makes the mise-en-scène whole, drives forward plot and thematic, and is used to enforce narrative techniques like breakpoints, dramatic tension, character development, and establishing the mood while all the time giving rise to a shifting terrain of meaning negotiated between the story teller and the audience (Mumford in Lund and Lund, 2009, 160).

In this work, says Fazolin,

I got completed works and sampled. The sampler is a technique that has been used for a long time and does not require great computer or mathematical knowledge to happen. It's one more thing to feel, I think this part of the movie has to do with that part of the music, and there I go rebuilding it. (Caio Fazolin, interviewed by Paloma Oliveira in Moran, 2016, 176).

The technique of remixing sound and visual material is transversal to analogue and digital equipment and, as Caio Fazolin states, two videocassettes (instead of software) could have been used instead. Software brings portability to the editing suite, comprised of heavy and large amounts of equipment, and increasing the possibilities of mixing through images overlapping and addition of graphics and effects. It contributed largely to the possibility of live mixing of sound and image through a variety of remixing techniques. Freely editing, according to a sense of spontaneity, became a feature of audiovisual largely disseminated through VJing. Improvisation requires in-depth knowledge of both content and equipment. Just as in musical improvisation, spontaneity, even when studied, opens up to the unexpected as part of the performance, and uses it:

With mishaps, error, which all digital systems may be prone to, I think that, at least in my work and in the work of other artists that I know, are important in the part of poetic creation itself. (Caio Fazolin, interviewed by Paloma Oliveira in Moran, 2016, 177)

The rhythm of the images accompanying the sound is fast, flashy without possibility to contemplation. To the rhythm in sound and image and its production through fast mix is relevant the error. Here, the error is of the equipment and of the performer's miscalculations on the live sequence of the clips, in improvisation. Errors are features rather than defaults, these take part in the aesthetic construction of spontaneous performativity.

3.2 NARRATIVE AS COMPOSITION: THE KAAMOS TRILOGY (2007-08), BY MIA MAKELA

The second case study reconfigures the concept of narrative as story by creating a narrative based on the notion of composition. Like in the visual arts and in the musical work, it is the thematic, chromatic and musical variations that, when subjected to "cyclicity"

and "repetitiveness", offer a reading which is always the same and always different. Contrary to the Pi Remix (1.1.1), in the Kaamos Trilogy the images and sounds are original. The performance combines the visual and sound recordings made during a dark winter in Finland with studio sound compositions. Visually, the performance has hints of colour on a continuum of black and white images. In her composition, which divides the event into three parts, the artist uses overlap and dissolution effects between one image and the next - which is often the repetition of the same - conferring a sense of flow and transformation. The video clips captured and edited are mixed live with the Max / Jitter software:

The selection process includes testing clips until reaching the effect of a continuous looping, because this is how they would be presented. Your viewing time exceeds its actual duration. The sections were modified and processed to the point of losing their connection with the original images, adapting to a more synthetic and symbolic appearance. (Makela in Moran, 2016, 189)

The Kaamos Trilogy tells the story of two women looking for a spring in the forest that is known for its powers of restoring sight. After obtaining the water, their way back seems endless and this idea of continuity in the story is reflected in the suggestion of the action beyond the duration of the performance. The three-act structure of the narrative gives it a three-step order, three acts of narrative flow: the first presents the beginning of the journey, the second introduces the characters and the plot, and the third resumes the journey. Throughout the three acts, progress is developed by means of an initial situation, of relative equilibrium, followed by incidents and climax, up to the final situation, which place us in a situation of disorder and feeling of no return. The existence of a journey which is to be made by the characters, even if the sequence of this destination may be changed, transforms the narrative into an uninterrupted and cyclic journey. The loop, suggesting cyclicity, takes us back to Pi Remix (1.1.1), and the way remixing techniques require elements for producing repetition. The repetition is spontaneously constructed and for that reason not possible to be produced again the same way. In the case of the Kaamos Trilogy, repetition's intention to produce meaning is a structure referring to a concept. Despite its non-linearity, there is a paradigmatic reading axis that gives meaning to the multifarious narrative. This axis is based on the recurrence of themes and motives: women, water, crossing the forest, the journey. Colour gradation is also a compositional determinant. The gradation of black used for the various shades of white and gray, throughout the three parts, associated with the greater or lesser dynamics of the lines, and to the greater or lesser filling of the space, is itself a means for conveying meaning throughout the development of the story and psychological environments. As the author explains:

Instead of the text, I prefer to use a piece of music, a photo, landscape, or even a sensation as a starting point in my works. The creative flow is built around this magnetic point, with the intention of communicating, not implicitly, but with the environment or the visual space. It is hoped that such state or visual space will then create the necessary emotional unconscious response in the viewer. Often surprisingly, this kind of subtle audiovisual communication has created a story for the viewer, although nothing has been said. (Mia Makela in Moran, 2016, 188).

In this composition, sound is essential in the relationship that it establishes with image, considering that the role of music in audiovisual performance goes beyond the concept of soundtrack. As Schacher (2008) points out, sound challenges our interpretive ability when music "specifically in non-melodic forms, brings to live cinema elements of non-representational and non-narrative, evolving structures that form a frame of reference for abstract time-based audio-visual work." Moreover, audiovisual creation itself absorbs principles of musical composition:

These principles can give valuable insights to the inner structure of live cinema performance even if the material is abstract. Rhythm, dynamics, movement, direction, speed, color, intensity and richness are important in a live performance, besides the imagery. (Makela, 2006).

The plot in Pi Remix (1.1.1) is the same as of the film and the space when both film and performance occur is also similar. Pi Remix (1.1.1), as presented at Arranjos Experimentais, to a seated audience, used three screens (instead of one as in the cinema). The exhibition conditions are the same for Kaasmos Trilogy but the plot doesn't find reference to a previous source of sound and image that existed. Kaasmos Trilogy refers to a structure, a composition common to all the performances (including the one presented at Arranjos Experimentais). To extend the possibilities of variation, Mia Makela has invited different musicians to collaborate with her in each of the different performances that occurred using the same structure and images providing more possibilities for variation based on the pre-existent structure.

3.3 NARRATIVE AS CONCEPT: BORIS CHIMP 504 (FROM 2010 TO PRESENT), RODRIGO CAR-VALHO E MIGUEL NETO

In this last case study, we found the limits to the concept of narrativity, considering that this study places story as a pretext from which all performances are constructed. Narrativity here is only plot or concept, a stimulus for creation and for the viewer to reconstruct meanings, nexus, analogies and deductions.

Boris Chimp 504, by Rodrigo Carvalho and Miguel Neto, is based on the last communication of Boris 504, the chimpanzee that was sent on a mission to the moon in 1969, from which he never returned. The performances that have been presented at different venues since 2010 speculate on the adventures that the chimpanzee has had since its disappearance in unknown space.

[A]s result, sound and visual imaginary are very abstract. I guess that if sound and image were too figurative it would spoil the magic. This way you can set the base story and then let the audience's imagination travel through deep space. However, in spite of the abstract forms, all the visuals suggest spaceship interfaces, orbital trajectories, traveling through hyperspace, morphing landscapes, creatures from the deep space, and etc. (Rodrigo Carvalho, interviewed by Ana Carvalho, s/d)

The possible relationships between sound, the image and the story they tell are suggestive. In the previous cases, a connection in the images has been established with the real-natural. In the case of Pi Remix (1.1.1), through the mise en scène and the acting in the film of origin and in the Kaasmos Trilogy through the landscape and the elements that

constitute it, where human silhouettes are suggested. While experiencing the performance, unlike the previous cases, the images are graphics with no relation to the real-natural, and it is the sound that maintains the connection with the temporal continuum. There is no reference to previous stories, such as Pi Remix (1.1.1), or a story that is told in a non-linear way, as is the case of the Kaamos Trilogy, where we find some sequencing between the three parts of the story. In this sense, Boris Chimp 504 offers the audience the enjoyment of a concept, an environment, unrelated to temporal sequentiality. If images, as much as sound, can be captured and distorted so as to move away from reality, both sound and image - can also be shaped by algorithms. This case places the abstraction which results from computational manipulation as an essential element of creation. Despite the fact that programming languages, such as Max / MSP / Jitter or Processing, among others, can control the parameterisation of image and sound, randomness is as a feature. Within this scope, the Boris Chimp 504 performance consists of abstract images, reduced to white graphics on a solid black background, in which the basic elements of composition and texture resulting from movements and repetitions prevail. As Rodrigo Carvalho points out, "In fact most of my visual work, on Boris Chimp 504 and on other projects, reflect that aesthetics: black and white, minimal, simple shapes, points and lines." (Rodrigo Carvalho, interviewed by Ana Carvalho, s/d).

Having as referential a story that leads all the performances, each performance is an instance, a fragment in an infinitude of fragments, micronarratives perpetually being constructed. If the spectator didn't know the story the performance refers to, still for him or her will be possible to experience the performance for its aesthetic pleasure. Aesthetic pleasure is at the centre of the three examples. Often, abstraction of the elements, without referential to the real, in their colour and shape, movement and velocity, are the story, being as well aesthetic stimulation.

It should be noted that the same idea or concept of Boris Chimp 504 as a performance is applied to a set of different audiovisual installations. In these cases, visitors are invited to explore the various space adventures by means of the interaction with physical interfaces within the exhibition environment. The interactive / reactive system between sound and

performance-building image extends beyond what is performed on stage by the artists, which allows the audience to have the same kind of manipulation. Composition, in this case, is detached from the realm of the performance, open to interpretation through collaboration as is the case of Kaasmos Trilogy, to encompass other formats for its interpretation.

4 | CONCLUSION

Throughout this study, we have focused on a retrospective theory about narrative structure and audiovisual performance so as to reflect upon the way in which contents resulting from a narrative experience in audiovisual performance are more focused on reception, from a post-structuralist perspective. Our analysis has pointed out that, in these forms, narrativity remits to the concepts of randomness, improvisation, cyclicity, remixing and composition.

At the same time, the narrative of composing or structuring a performance may bring it closer to musicality. In this perspective and, similarly to what happens with jazz improvisation, performance is inseparable from the process that it is made up of, both intertwine in a way that is intangible for cinematographic composition. In any case, even if these forms can be considered as narrative dismantling machines, the advent of this performed audiovisual narratives, require new theoretical approaches and point to the growing role of the viewer as a narrative producer (Toolan, 2004). The challenge of this analysis will be henceforth to understand that the sequence of the clips is inseparable from the performance, its presentation context, and the way that impulsivity and spontaneity will underline the concepts discussed here.

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