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Towards a Theory of the Imaginative Dialogue: Four Dialogical Principles

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Abstract
This paper seeks to initiate a theory of "imaginative dialogues" by articulating four dialogical principles that enable such a dialogue to occur. It is part of a larger project that takes the Socratic dialogue, a widely utilized conversation technique in philosophy education, as a starting point and aims to reinterpret it by shifting emphasis to the pre-reflective, prelinguistic, and multimodal aspects of dialogues, involving both their verbal and embodied dimensions. To integrate the verbal dimensions of a dialogue with its more elusive embodied dimensions, the paper will examine the notion 'dialogue' from the perspective of two different strategies. The first strategy chiefly focuses on *the dialogic encounter*. The 'in-between' of this dialogic encounter enables something to emerge that transcends the individual perspective of the speakers involved. The second strategy is primarily concerned with *internal differentiation*. The minor differences that constitute this internal differentiation, differentiate a dialogue from within. These strategies are not mutually exclusive but indicate a variation in starting point and orientation. This paper proposes to combine these two strategies by linking accounts of the productive moments in verbal dialogues to an account of the imaginative potential of embodied dialogues. This will enable the articulation of four dialogical principles (derived from Lev Yakubinsky, Oswald Ducrot, Martin Buber, and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz) through which an imaginative dialogue can proceed.

Keywords Dialogue · Imagination · Arts education · Lev Yakubinsky · Oswald Ducrot · Martin Buber · Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz

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The Broader Project – a Pedagogy of Imaginative Dialogues

The pedagogical conversation technique of the Socratic dialogue, as I understand it, starts from the assumption that theory is not abstract, but ultimately inheres within the concreteness of everyday practices.[1] Therefore, the aim is to invite students to participate in a collaborative exploration of a philosophical problem by explicating the implicit theories that inhere within their own everyday experience, making these theories available for thought, articulating them in a series of concepts, and opening them up for critical scrutiny. My contention is that under the heading of 'imaginative dialogues' a similar approach can be employed in the field of arts education, extending it beyond verbal dialogues and their embodied elements (voice, tone, gesture, etc.), to incorporate fully embodied collaborative interactions. Here, the objective is to encourage students to engage in a collective artistic exploration of a specific location, drawing upon the imaginative elements already present in their immediate experience, and transforming these experiences into imaginative creations.

My contribution to a pedagogy of imaginative dialogues—the broader project within which this paper is situated—encompasses three lines of inquiry that, together, will facilitate the transfer from the Socratic dialogue (in the field of philosophy education) to the imaginative dialogue (in the field of arts education). This paper will only concentrate on a first line of inquiry, which pertains to the 'dialogue' aspect in the notion 'imaginative dialogue'. The aim is to develop a broadened conception of dialogue that—seen within the context of the broader project—can facilitate the creation of imaginative dialogues. This will mark the first step towards conceptualizing the imaginative dialogue.[2] Two subsequent papers will address the second and third lines of inquiry, with the second one focusing on clarifying the 'imaginative' aspect of the imaginative dialogue. This will be done by employing two procedures that are drawn from the arts: the procedure of *fruitful tensions*, which engenders both shock and fusion, and the procedure of *continuous variations*, which tends towards a productive limit.[3] As the notion 'imaginative dialogue' suggests, it is only by combining the first and the second line of inquiry that its potential for the field of arts education will become fully manifest. From a methodological standpoint, a third inquiry will be needed. This will involve establishing an analogy between the Socratic dialogue, an already well-developed pedagogical instrument, and the imaginative dialogue, which still requires a clear pedagogical methodology. Here my main hypothesis is that, just as Socratic dialogues attempt to reconcile the contradiction between theory and practice, imaginative dialogues aim to reconcile the opposition between the real and the imaginary, demonstrating that the latter ultimately inheres within the former.

[1] The transformation of the Socratic dialogue (as practised by Socrates in Plato's dialogues) into a much more restricted pedagogical conversation technique is usually attributed to Leonard Nelson. His Neo-Kantian approach focused firmly on consensus and aimed to reach universal truths. Heckmann 1981 and Specht 1944 remedied this universalist approach. My version of the Socratic dialogue, which I have used in various contexts, is informed by this tradition but is primarily directed at giving students tools to reconcile the opposition between theory and practice, theorizing their own everyday experiences. Also see: Nelson 1928, 1949, Boele 1997, Saran & Neisser 2004, Brune et al. 2010, Knezic et al. 2010, Weiss 2015.

[2] It will not be impossible to engage with the full range of the scholarship on dialogue, which can often be traced back to the following sources (in addition to Buber discussed below): Bakhtin 1981, 1984, 1986, Bohm 1996, Dewey 1974, Eskin 2020, Freire 1996, Freire & Shor 1987, Gadamer 2001, 2010. Oakeshott 1989, Voloshinov 1986, Vygotsky 1962, 1978. Also see De Man 1983, Fairfield 2011, Nikulin 1998, 2005, 2010, Skidmore & Murakami 2016, Todorov 1981.

[3] This builds on my dissertation (Boven 2016).

The first line of inquiry, the one developed in this paper, will start with an analysis of two dialogical principles that concern verbal dialogues.[4] A first principle, following the strategy of the dialogical encounter, is derived from the findings of Lev Petrovich Yakubinsky (1997), highlighting the mutual interruption that characterizes verbal interactions between two or more speakers. This principle, which I will call the principle of deferred continuity, embodies the imaginative potential of the verbal components of the dialogic encounter. The second principle, derived from Oswald Ducrot's theory of verbal polyphony (1984, 2009), is based on the strategy of internal differentiation. According to Ducrot, the utterances of any speaker tend to be polyphonic, as they contain implied multiplicities of pre-individual points of view. It is this polyphony that generates their imaginative potential, providing us with a principle of implied multiplicities.

Moving to a more embodied account of the dialogue, I will outline a third principle derived from Martin Buber's works (2005, 2019). Buber emphasizes the embodied encounter between an I (*Ich*) and a You (*Du*), in which the ordinary continuity of time and space is suspended in what Buber calls 'a present of waiting-opposite' (*Gegenwart*). This suspended continuity allows for the imaginative potential of another being to emerge. Finally, the fourth principle will be derived from Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz's conception of embodied polyphony (1999). Leibniz demonstrates that the body's overall inclination is constantly differentiated from within by an infinite number of minute, pre-individual perceptions and appetitions. This principle of implied infinities expresses the imaginative potential of the internal dialogue that takes place within the body.

Mutual Interruption in Verbal Encounters—The Principle of Deferred Continuity

Yakubinsky's article "On Dialogic Speech [O Dialogicheskoy Rechi]" (1997), initially published in 1923 and one of the early studies on 'dialogic phenomena,' provides us with a first starting point for an exploration of the concept of 'dialogue', following the strategy of the dialogic encounter.[5] In this article, Yakubinsky approaches the verbal dialogue as "the alternation of rejoinders" Yakubinsky 1997, 250. which is based on mutual interruption and leads to a constant deferral of the thought process of the speakers, creating a dynamic and collective trajectory that is informed by each of the participants.[6] As Yakubinsky expresses it:

> One might say that, to a certain extent, mutual interruption is characteristic of dialogue in general. […] Our participation in dialogue is determined by our expectation of being interrupted, by our awareness that an interlocutor [i.e., the other speaker] is preparing to respond, by our fear that we might not be able to say all that we want to say… [As such] we may describe the alternation of utterances in

[4] The distinction between verbal and embodied dialogues has only been made for convenience's sake. It does not indicate an opposition, but rather refers to the tendency within Yakubinsky and Ducrot to highlight the verbal aspects of dialogue (without ignoring its embodied elements) and the tendency within Buber and Leibniz to focus on the embodied aspects of dialogue (without ignoring its verbal elements).

[5] For discussions of Yakubinsky that take a different approach, see Oliveira and Lyra 2012, Skidmore & Murakami 2016, Skidmore 2019.

[6] On the issue of mutual interruptions also see Nikulin 2010, 95–118.

> dialogue in the following terms: while one interlocutor 'is not done yet,' the other 'is already continuing.' Yakubinsky 1997, 250.

This dynamic of the 'not being done yet' of the first speaker and the 'already continuing' of the second one implies a deferred continuity that keeps postponing the thought process developed and sustained by the dialogue.

The deferred continuity of the 'not yet' and the 'already there' does not always emerge in the same way but gives rise to a dialogic spectrum. At one end of this spectrum, we find the 'non-dialogue,' when the deferral of thought has become so strong that the speakers get stuck and talk at cross-purposes. In other words, the 'not yet' of the first speaker becomes so dominant that it never allows any room for the 'already there' of the second speaker (and the other way around). At the other end of the spectrum, we find the 'functional dialogue' in which the deferral is so minor that it amounts to an exchange of harmless niceties. Here, the speakers meet right in the middle between the 'not yet' and the 'already there,' where there is no friction between them. In everyday situations, verbal encounters are often defined by this mode of dialogue, even though, at any moment, there is the potential for the deferral to manifest itself.

Between the two ends of the dialogic spectrum, we find a wide range of frictional dialogues in which the 'not yet' of the first speaker is in continuous tension with the 'already there' of the second one. Through these frictional dialogues, the deferred continuity of the 'not yet' and the 'already there' really comes about. It is only in such frictional dialogues that the deferred continuity starts to generate the conditions for new and unforeseen responses. These new responses are imaginative insofar as they were not present beforehand but are born within the dialogue.

Above, I discussed the deferred continuity of the verbal dialogue itself: the 'not yet' of the initial speaker and the 'already there' of the subsequent one. This is the first dimension of the deferred temporarily, which concerns the dialogue in its entirety. In addition, we can add a second dimension to the deferred continuity, which no longer affects the full dialogue but concerns the internal dynamics of each speaker's contribution to the dialogue. Yakubinsky describes this second dimension as follows:

> In a dialogue, our preparation for an utterance is usually accompanied by our reception of the interlocutor's [i.e., the other speaker's] utterance: during an interval between our utterances, we must listen to and understand our interlocutor's utterance and simultaneously prepare our response thematically and linguistically-a complication that does not arise in monologue. This is of utmost importance. Given the limits of the human mind, the duality of tasks to be accomplished (the reception and understanding of another's speech and the preparation of our response) weakens our performance of both. Yakubinsky 1997, 251.

During the verbal dialogue, each speaker needs to perform two tasks at once: the preparation of their contributions is 'not yet finished'; the reception of the contributions of the other is 'already there.' This adds another layer of complexity to the deferred continuity of the verbal exchange, doubling the 'not yet' and the 'already there.' Indeed, this second dimension of the deferred continuity is inherently intertwined with the first. While it may not be possible to completely separate these dimensions, the imaginative potential of the deferred continuity lies in both of them. By distinguishing between them, we can gain a clearer understanding of the imaginative aspects of the verbal dialogue.

Yakubinsky's analysis of mutual interruption allowed me to specify the deferred continuity of the (frictional) dialogue as a condition for the emergence of imaginative verbal dialogues. A further implication of this deferred continuity, I would argue, is that while the continuity of the thought processes of the involved speakers is constantly deferred, a collaborative realm is established that possesses a certain continuity of its own. This implies that, as soon as they enter a dialogue, the first and the second speakers (as well as any other active participant) start to become functions of the dialogue. It is as if the dialogue produces new versions of them in which they begin to think thoughts they never had and express themselves in a language they never used before. In this sculpting of the speakers by the mutual interruption inherent in the dialogue, the imaginative potential of the verbal encounter becomes most prominent.

Pre-Individual Points of View in Verbal Polyphony—The Principle of Implied Multiplicities

In the previous section, I developed a linguistic account of dialogue and explored it from the angle of the strategy of dialogic encounters. In this section, I continue this linguistic account, but I now shift my attention to the opposite strategy: the strategy of internal differentiation. For this, I focus on the theory of polyphony as it was articulated by the French linguist Oswald Ducrot in his 1984 book *Le dire et le dit*, further elaborated in a series of lectures given in 1991 at the Institute for the Study of Humanities in Ljubljana (published in English in 2009 as *Slovenian Lectures*).[7] One could say that Ducrot's analyses are situated on the same plane as the second dimension of deferred continuity discussed above. As we saw, Yakubinsky focused on the dynamic of the dialogic encounter that comes to the fore in the 'not yet' of the preparation and the 'already there' of the reception of the contribution of a single speaker. Ducrot shifts his attention from the deferred continuity inherent in the dialogic encounter to the multiplicity of points of view implied in the utterance. As we will see, it is in this multiplicity that the imaginative potential of verbal polyphony resides.

Ducrot aims to apply Bakhtin's notion 'polyphony'—until then "only applied to texts, that is to say to sequences of utterances [*des suites d'énoncés*], and never to the utterances [*énoncés*] of which these texts are made up" (1984, 171)—to the isolated utterances themselves.[8] By showing that these utterances often contain various (conflicting) points of view, Ducrot articulates "a (very free) extension of Bakhtin's research on literature to linguistics." (1984, 173) Ducrot's verbal polyphony aims to contest "the postulate according to which an isolated utterance makes a single voice heard" (1984, 171). A postulate that, according to him, was left untouched in Bakthin's intertextual polyphony. Instead, Ducrot argues, "every utterance is a sort of small play, a sort of mini dialogue." (2009, 45) This conception of verbal polyphony provides a more precise vocabulary for understanding

[7] Ducrot introduced this notion in "Note sur la polyphonie et la construction des interlocuteurs" Ducrot (1980), but only developed it fully in *Le dire et le dit* (1984). Since then, various scholars have further developed the theory, including some of Ducrot's co-authors, see Anscombre 2009, Carel 2011. Ducrot was also important inspiration for the Scandinavian theory of polyphony (ScaPoLine), see Nølke 2017.

[8] Ducrot explicitly mentions Bakhtin here, but in a series of interviews with Amir Biglari (Ducrot & Biglari 2013) he explicitly says that his theory of polyphony is not based on Bakhtin but is inspired by Charles Bally's conception of "the modal subject" (64), develops "an intuition of Sigmund Freud" (28), and takes up Jean Paul Sartre's idea that "the other is in us" (47). Also see Ducrot 1989 (mainly the chapter on Bally).

the imaginative potential of the multiplicity of points of view implied in simple verbal utterances.

Following the strategy of internal differentiation, Ducrot distinguishes between the empirical being of the speaking subject and the various internal 'speakers' that only exist within the utterance itself (as beings of discourse) and that are implied by it. I focus on two of these internal speakers.[9]

1. The primary speaker, who is responsible for the utterance (*l'énoncé*), for which Ducrot reserves the technical term *le locuteur*, which can be translated as the locutor.
2. The secondary, local speakers, whose positions or points of view are expressed in the uttering (*l'énonciation*), for which Ducrot reserves the technical term '*l'énonciateur*, which I will translate as the utterer.

To illustrate the distinction between these two internal speakers. Ducrot gives a series of examples. Here, I can only zoom in on two of them. The first can be situated within the contemporary art world by relating it to an item from the art-theme-bemusement park Dismaland, temporarily set up by British graffiti artist Banksy in 2015. This item, still for sale on the internet, is a balloon made by David Shrigley, which says, 'I am an imbecile.' Imagine that a prototype of this balloon would be released during a public debate between graffiti artists Banksy and King Robbo in the years of their feud (2009–2010). The former catches the balloon and hands it over to the latter. 'This is meant for you, King Robbo.' After a pause, Robbo answers: 'So, I am an imbecile, well, you will see,' and leaves the stage.

In Robbo's response, who is the primary speaker or locutor of the utterance 'I am an imbecile'? This role is easy to assign. It is the person designated by the *I* pronoun, which is undeniably Robbo. To clarify the difference, Ducrot compares it with the difference between the character and the author in theater:

> the utterer [secondary speaker] is to the locutor [primary speaker] what the character is to the author [in theater].… the locutor, responsible for the utterance, gives existence… to utterers whose points of view and attitudes she organizes. The locutor's position can manifest itself either because she assimilates herself to this or that utterer, taking it as her representative (the utterer is then actualized), or simply because she has chosen to make them appear… even if she does not assimilate to any of them[.] (1984, 205)

However, even though Robbo is the locutor of the utterance 'I am an imbecile,' Robbo does not express his point of view, but that he is taking up "the point of view of a person different from himself, a point of view which he undoubtedly does not approve at all and even, one can suppose, which he vehemently rejects." (Ducrot 2009, 35) This point of view, which is not Robbo's, can be assigned to a secondary speaker or utterer, who is implied by his utterance.

> I call 'utterers' [*énonciateurs*] those entities [*ces êtres*] which are meant to express themselves in the uttering [*l'énonciation*], even though the specific words used are not attributed to them; if they 'speak,' it is only in the sense that their points

[9] Ducrot adds a third role: the empirical producer (*le producteur empirique*), not important for my purposes, without which the utterance cannot be produced.

> of view, their positions, their attitudes are seen to be expressed in the uttering, but not—in the material sense of that term—their words. (Ducrot 1984, 204)

Even if, strictly speaking, Banksy did not call him an imbecile, Robbo interprets the gesture of handing him the balloon as confirmation of Banksy's belief that he is an imbecile and assigns it to an utterer. The utterance, including the comment 'well, you will see,' contains a second utterer, expressing a contrasting point of view: 'I am not an imbecile, and I will proof it.' Both these utterers are implied by Robbo's utterance.

Ducrot's notion of the 'utterer,' the bearer of an implied point of view, gives me a more precise instrument for pinpointing the internal differentiation already at play in the discourse of a single speaker. Here, the focus shifts from the differences between the points of view of a first and a second speaker to the implied multiplicity of local points of view that emerge within the utterances of a single speaker. This becomes even clearer in Ducrot's analysis of so-called non-X utterances. Ducrot shows that non-X utterances generally contain at least two utterers: one whose point of view is presented as X (the positive utterer) and another whose point of view is presented as non-X (the negative utterer). Take, for instance, the following sentence:

(Marina) Abramović won't come, and I regret it as it would have been nice.

The first part of this sentence is undeniably a non-X utterance. If Ducrot is correct, it contains at least two utterers. A positive utterer whose point of view is that Abramović will come; a negative utterer who disagrees and believes that Abramović will not come. This analysis is confirmed when we look at the continuation of the sentence ('and I regret it as it would have been nice'). As Ducrot indicates, "the two occurrences of *it* do not refer back to the same thing at all." (2009, 38) The first one refers to the point of view of the negative utterer that 'Abramović won't come' and expresses regret about it. The second one refers to the point of view of the positive utterer that 'Abramović will come' and conveys a feeling of anticipation and joy. If only one of the two points of view had been present in the non-x utterance, the sentence could not have been continued in the way it was.

The example of the non-x utterance only contained two utterers, presenting a negative and a positive point of view. Still, we should refrain from concluding from this that the implied multiplicity of verbal polyphony is restricted to that. As Ducrot says, in "certain analyses of mine … there are four, five, six, even seven utterers: the number of utterers is absolutely unlimited." (2009, 41).

After articulating his theory of polyphony, Ducrot continues to show that points of view are not deliberately assigned to utterers by locutors but are already prefigured by the language system. In his theory of polyphony, this already came to the fore in his analysis of words like elegance or dirty, in which the utterer is contained within the word itself, presenting a positive (elegance) or negative (dirty) point of view. He develops this further in his theory of *topoi* by showing that utterers are "argumentative entities and that their points of view are argumentatively oriented." (2009, 79) These argumentative entities and their points of view are not designed by the locutor but are derived from the language system. Therefore, these points of view can be said to be pre-individual, drawing from collective structures. All in all, I take away two crucial insights from the analyses of Ducrot:

1. *An implied multiplicity:* for Ducrot, "each one of our utterances represents a multiplicity of points of view, some of which can differ from the locutor." (2009, 47) This multicity

is implied within the utterance, is potentially unlimited, and introduces points of view not endorsed by the locutor.

2. *Pre-individual points of view:* the theory of polyphony shows that the position we take in our utterances can only emerge against the background of pre-individual points of view that inhere in or are prepared by the lexical and syntactical features of language. We could even say, pushing Ducrot's points a bit, that language is not spoken by us but that we are spoken by language.

Within this implied multiplicity of pre-individual points of view, the imaginative potential of discourse is located, indicating that even simple utterances can already be approached as imaginative mini-dialogues.

My reading of Yakubinsky and Ducrot provided me with a rich and nuanced account of dialogue in which I mainly looked at dialogue as a linguistic phenomenon. Whereas Yakubinsky focused on the deferred continuity of the 'not yet' and the 'already there' that defines the mutual interruption of the dialogic encounter, we saw that Ducrot highlighted an internalized interruption in which the primary speaker (locutor) is always already interrupted by a series of secondary speakers (utterers), creating a verbal polyphony that is internal to the utterance as such. Both Yakubinsky and Ducrot know that dialogues are not just linguistic phenomena but also occur as embodied events. Nevertheless, their focus on the linguistic aspects of the dialogue makes it hard to tease out its more embodied dimensions. To remedy this, I will now develop an embodied account of dialogue in discussion with Buber (representing the strategy of the dialogic encounter) and Leibniz (representing the strategy of internal differentiation).

'Waiting-Opposite' in Embodied Encounters—the Principle of Suspended Continuity

Following Yakubinsky, I situated the imaginative potential of the verbal encounter in the deferred continuity of a mutual interruption. In Martin Buber's work, the encounter becomes a much more fundamental, strongly embodied phenomenon that goes beyond the 'not yet' and the 'already there' of a deferred continuity.[10] In Buber, the imaginative potential of the encounter is situated in a suspended continuity that postpones the ordinary flow of time. I derive three interrelated notions from Buber that allow us to get a better sense of this: (1) the envelopment of the other (*Umfassung*); (2) the turn towards the other (*Hinwendung*) as a finite center outside of the circle of the self; (3) the temporality of 'the present as waiting-opposite' (*Gegenwart*), which constitutes reciprocity between an I and a You. This third aspect, which integrates the other two, allows me to fully pinpoint the imaginative potential of the embodied encounter.

From an educational perspective, Buber's most relevant text is his "Rede über das Erzieherische [Speech about the Educational]" (2005), written in 1926, in which he highlights the concept *Umfassung* (usually translated as inclusion, but which is more accurately

[10] I would like to thank Dr. Eeva Anttila for directing me towards Buber's embodied conception of dialogue, which convinced me that I had to study his writings more carefully. For her engagement with Buber in dance education, see Anttila 2003. For other sources on Buber, see Bergman 2012, Habermas 2015, and Brinn 2016.

rendered as envelopment).[11] An *Umfassung* or envelopment in Buber's sense, emerges when a chance interaction turns into a real encounter that gives rise to "an experience of the opposite side [*die Erfahrung der Gegenseite*]." (Buber 2005, 148) To illustrate this, Buber gives the example of an assailant hitting another person who does not fight back. In the middle of the assault, it feels suddenly to the assailant as if he received the blow that he just delivered to the other. "For a moment he experiences the shared situation from the opposite side [*erfährt er die gemeinsame Situation von der Gegenseite aus*]." Buber 2005 (148) It is this moment of experiencing a shared situation from the opposite side that Buber calls *Umfassung* or envelopment. Of course, after this sudden experience, it is still up to the assailant whether he "drowns the voice of his soul" and continues his assault or "overturns his instinct" and puts a halt to the blows he is delivering. Buber 2005 (148) This example makes sufficiently clear that envelopment, in its most minimal sense, should be understood as *an experience of the otherness of the opposite side* that suddenly manifests itself in an encounter.

Buber is at pains to ensure that envelopment is not mistaken for empathy (*Einfühlung*). For him, empathy is a movement of projecting (*versetzen*) oneself into something else and tracing that 'something else' from within at the cost of the concreteness of the embodied encounter. Such a projection results in the "dismantling [*Ausschaltung*] of one's concreteness [*Konkretheit*]." (Buber 2005 149) As he indicates, "envelopment [*Umfassung*] is the opposite of this: the expansion [*Erweitung*] of one's concreteness, the fulfillment of the lived situation, the complete presence [*Präsenz*] of the reality in which one participates." Buber (2005). In conclusion, Buber sums up the three constituting elements of envelopment:

> …first, a relation, of any kind, between two persons towards each other; second, a shared event that is experienced by both of them [*ein von beiden gemeinsam erfahrener Vorgang*], and in which at least one of them actively participates; third, the fact that this one person, without weakening anything of the felt reality of her own activity [*ihres eigenen Tätigseins*], also experiences this shared event from the side of the other [*von der andern aus*]. (2005, 149)

It is essential to highlight that an envelopment involves all three elements: a relation, a shared event, and an experience of the opposite side.

This brings me to Buber's second concept: *die Hinwendung*, 'the turn towards (the other).' Buber introduces this concept in the text *Zwiesprache* from 1932. A careful reading of Buber's text makes clear that 'turning towards (the other)' can be understood in terms of envelopment:

> It seems as if this [turn towards the other] happens every hour and is irrelevant: if you look at others, speak to them, you turn to them… However, which of all these [everyday turns] is an essential act? … [Essential, in the sense] that, within the impossibility to envelop what is given [*der Unumfaßlichkeit—literally: un-envelopment-ability—des Vorhandenen*], this one person looms up and becomes a presence; and then, in our perception, the world ceases to be an indifferent multiplicity of points… and becomes a limitless turmoil around a narrow, brightly-outlined, strong breakwater [*Damm*]—limitless, except for the limits placed by the breakwater; thus, if not

[11] The concept also plays a vital role in the "Nachwort [zu *Ich und Du*]," written in 1957. (Buber 2019, 243–251).

encircled, it at least has become finite in the center, it has become manifest [*bildlich*], releasing it from indifference! (2019, 133)

To better understand what Buber is saying here, it will be helpful to specify the implicit analogy on which he relies (Fig. 1). This is an analogy between:

I. our perception of the ocean (the impossibility of encompassing its immensity);
II. our perception of the world (the impossibility of enveloping everything we encounter).

Figure 1 analogy is structured like this: I. *relates to* a, b, c, *as* II. *relates to* d, e, f. It is specified in fig. 1 below.

The ocean finds a finite center in the breakwater, delimiting its immensity; in the same way, the world finds a finite center in the one person that looms up within our impressions of the world as something that cannot be contained within it. By turning towards this one person, enveloping this other, the other becomes a finite center for us. Because of this finite center, the world is no longer reduced to an indifferent multitude of points that have no value in themselves. Through the essential act of envelopment, we experience the opposite side; this turns the other (who remains foreign to us) into a finite center of meaning that cannot be incorporated within the circle of the self, but that is situated outside of it. Buber describes this as follows: "to make the other [*den Andern*] present in his own particular existence [*den Andern in dessen eigentümlichem Dasein vergegenwärtigt*], enveloping him [*ja ihn umfaßt*], so that the situations that one has in common with him are also experienced from out of his, the other's, side [*von seinem, des Andern, Ende*]."[12] (2019, 134).

We can now summarize the dynamic of the dialogical movement as follows:

Dialogical movement
Orientation: 'turning towards (the other)' (*Hinwendung*).
Essential action: envelopment of the other (*Umfassung*)
Constituting elements: experiencing the otherness of the opposite side, experiencing a shared situation, entering into a relation, letting the other side emerge as a finite center outside the circle of the self.

It is crucial to remember that, at each moment, this dynamic can break down, bringing the dialogical movement to a halt.

To articulate the imaginative potential of Buber's dialogical movement, we must investigate a third concept: the present of waiting-opposite the other. This concept is derived from

I. The impossibility to encompass the ocean *as relates to*	**II. The impossibility to envelop the world** *relates to*
a. the ocean as an absolute immensity	d. the world as an indifferent multiplicity of points
b. the breakwater (as finite center)	e. this one person that looms up (as finite center)
c. the turmoil around the breakwater	f. our perception that folds itself around this one person

Fig. 1 Unpacking the imagery of the 'breakwater'

[12] N.b., the verb 'vergegenwärtigen' should ideally be read in line with the way I unpack the notion of *Gegenwart* further down in this article. Something like 'making the other present through a waiting-opposite.'.

Ich und Du, a playful and poetic work in which Buber utilizes the semantic roots of German words to articulate his views. To make this visible in English, I will need to push the translations of these terms beyond their ordinary renderings.

In *Ich und Du*, Buber argues that human beings have a twofold association with the world, corresponding to a twofold attitude. The first attitude corresponds to the circle of the self. Following this attitude, human beings perceive what is around them as a useful world of things, "things merely, and beings as things… an ordered world, an isolated world." (2019, 57) Buber characterizes this attitude through the word pair 'I-It (*Ich-Es*),' constituting 'a world of It (*Eswelt*).' The second attitude corresponds to the envelopment and 'turning towards' discussed above. Following this attitude, human beings "place themselves opposite [*begegnet*] being and becoming," approaching it as an "opposite-and-across [*Gegenüber*], as always just one essential being [*einer Wesenheit*] and each thing just as an essential being [*Wesenheit*]." (Buber 2019, 57) Buber describes this attitude, which is the primary focus of his book, with the word pair 'I-You (*Ich-Du*). Buber further remarks that the 'I' can only be understood as part of one of these word pairs. "There is no I in itself, but only the I of root word I-You [*Ich-Du*] or the I of the root word I-It [*Ich-Es*]." (Buber 2019, 39) From *Ich und Du,* we can derive three interlinked dimensions that characterize the embodied encounter, each of which gives us a new perspective on the dialogical movement that is inherent within it: (a) the spatial dimension of the embodied encounter; (b) its reciprocity; (c) its temporal dimension. Let us start with the first.

As we saw, Buber characterized the second, enveloping attitude of the I-You as an 'opposite-and-across' (*Gegenüber*). In considering a tree, for instance, a moment can emerge "that I… become enveloped [*eingefaßt*] in relation to him, and now he is no longer an It [*Es*]." The tree—which is no longer approached as an It, but as a You—"embodies itself opposite-and-across me [*er leibt mir gegenüber*]." (Buber 2019, 42) Here the 'I' no longer places itself "in front of things [*vor den Dingen*]" but places itself "opposite-and across them [*ihnen gegenüber*]," which constitutes 'the placing opposite of the encounter'(*Begegnung*). This provides the first dimension of the encounter:

a. The spatial dimension "The You does indeed appear in space, but in the excluding opposite-and-across [*dem ausschließlichen Gegenüber*], where everything else only functions as the background out of which it emerges, not its limit and measure." (Buber 2019, 56).

The You is an 'opposite-and-across' that excludes everything else from the 'placing opposite' of the encounter. These other things do not disappear, they recede into the background. It is from this background that the You emerges. The spatial aspect echoes a series of other words Buber uses to characterize the embodied encounter, each containing the German root 'gegen' (opposite). Here, 'opposite' should not be understood in terms of contradiction or hostility; it simply indicates that the You does not coincide with the I but is placed on the other side, opposite the I. This brings us to the second dimension of the encounter, its reciprocity.

Buber argues that the embodied I-You encounter implies a "working on the opposite-and-across [*Wirken am Gegenüber*]," which he describes as: "My You works on me, as I work on him [*Mein Du wirkt an mir, wie ich an ihm wirke*]." (Buber 2019, 47) This presents the second dimension of the encounter:

b. Reciprocity: the You "simultaneously appears as 'working on' [*wirkend*] and 'being worked on' [*Wirkung empfangend*], not as inserted into a chain of causes, but in the 'reciprocity of working on each other' [*Wechselwirkung*] in which it relates to the I, the beginning and end of the event." (Buber 2019, 56).

Throughout *Ich und Du*, Buber brings in a whole range of words that refer to work, playing on their etymology: *wirken* (to work on), *wirkend* (working on), *die* W*irkung* (a continued working on), *wirklich* (what is realized through work), *verwirklichen* (realizing something through work), *Wirklichkeit* (the reality that emerged through work), *Wechselwirkung* (the reciprocity of working on each other). None of these variations of work should be understood in terms of a deliberate effort to achieve something through a specific activity. Work here indicates an affective dimension in which You—being opposite-and-across me—impacts me and does so in the same way as I impact You. This is what Buber calls *Wechselwirkung*; the encounter begins and ends with this reciprocal work on each other, and the encounter can only be sustained if this work is continued. The moment it stops, the You of the encounter sinks back into the world of It.

The last dimension of the embodied encounter is its temporality. Buber's embodied dialogue does not take place in a deferred continuity but rather in a suspended continuity from which, as we already saw above, everything is excluded except the You. This suspended continuity creates its own duration and cannot be inserted in the everyday "interconnectedness of time and space." (Buber 2019, 58).

c. The temporal dimension: the You "appears in time but in the time of a 'process that is fulfilled within itself'; it is not lived as part of a constant and well-structured succession but in a 'moment [*Weile*],' whose purely intensive dimension can only be determined by the You itself." (Buber 2019, 56).

Buber characterizes this 'process that is fulfilled within itself' or this 'moment' in terms of the present (*Gegenwart*). Not the point-like present (*Gegenwart* in the ordinary sense) "that merely indicates the conclusion of a 'finished' time that was fixed in thought at a certain moment, the semblance of a captured ending." (Buber 2019, 56) Instead, Buber draws on the etymology of the word *Gegenwart*, and highlights the 'gegen' (opposite) and the 'warten' (waiting) that can still be heard within this word. The temporality of the encounter between I and you can, therefore, best be understood as "the present as 'waiting-opposite' [*Gegenwart* in Buber's sense] that is 'realized through work' [*Wirklich*] and is fulfilled in it." (Buber 2019, 56) This present "is only given as long as the 'waiting-opposite-ness' [*Gegenwärtigkeit*], the 'placing opposite of the encounter' [*Begegnung*], and the relation are actually given." (Buber 2019, 56) This element of waiting, still audible in the German notion of *Gegenwart*, allows Buber to characterize the temporality of the embodied encounter as a reciprocal 'waiting-opposite.' This 'waiting-opposite' is not about waiting for something specific. Instead, it is an essential waiting that places the I and the You in relation to each other without turning either of them into an It (at least for a while, the I-You cannot be sustained indefinitely).

The dialogical movement and the three dimensions of the embodied encounter all point towards a suspended continuity in which the I of the I-You appears. This I is no longer enclosed within the circle of the self, within which everything else merely appears as an object to be used (the I of the I-It). Since the I is now placed opposite-and-across a You, a new temporality opens, in which both the I and the You are 'waiting-opposite' each other.

This is not a passive *waiting for*, but an essential *waiting-opposite* that is active and can best be understood in terms of 'the reciprocity of working on each other' (*die Wechselwirkung*). I called it a suspended continuity because it excludes everything except the You. In this way, it breaks open the interconnectedness of time and space that defines the circle of the self and creates the imaginative potential of what the self could not have foreseen.

Pre-Individual Appetitions in Embodied Polyphony—the Principle of Implied Infinities

Buber's conception of dialogue followed the strategy of the dialogic encounter we found earlier in Yakubinsky. In contrast to the latter, however, Buber is much more attentive to the embodied aspects of this dialogue, highlighting the imaginative potential of the suspended continuity of a reciprocal 'waiting-opposite.' From the works of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, himself a writer of an extensive number of dialogues, I will now derive an understanding of the embodied dialogue that follows the strategy of internal differentiation.[13]

In his *Nouveaux Essais sur l'entendement humain [New Essays on Understanding]* (1999) from around 1705, Leibniz provides an impressively subtle, embodied account of perception and inclination that is still highly relevant today.[14] Unlike Buber, Leibniz does not highlight the uniqueness of the embodied encounter but focuses on the internal differentiation inherent within the embodied perception of the world. In a sense, this radicalizes Buber's notion of envelopment by pointing out that on the unconscious level of confused minute perceptions, the envelopment of the other has always already taken place. It is true that here the uniqueness of the other does not fully emerge yet, but with Leibniz, we could argue that this uniqueness nevertheless leaves a mark on the unconscious perception of the self. Pushing Leibniz's perspective, I suggest that all these confused unconscious perceptions—and the confused unconscious appetitions to which they give rise—already drill tiny holes in the circle of the self, constantly opening it up to an unconscious experience of the opposite side. This constitutes an implied infinity of tiny centers (themselves finite) that mark the self from within, creating another domain of imaginative potentiality to experiment with in imaginative dialogues.

From Leibniz's perspective, our bodies are continuously differentiated by an infinite number of minute changes, generating a continuous state of unrest. Each of these minute changes takes place on two levels at once: *the level of perception* and *the level of inclination*. To understand Leibniz's conception of embodied dialogue, three important notions need to be unpacked: (1) minute perceptions (on the level of perception); (2) minute appetitions (on the level of inclination); (3) the unrest (*l'inquiétude*) that results from the dynamic between minute perceptions and minute appetitions.

Let us start with the level of perception.[15] In Leibniz's view, "a perception of light or color […] of which we are aware is composed of a large number of minute perceptions

[13] For more on Leibniz's practice of dialogue, see Giolito 2005.

[14] My reading of Leibniz is inspired by Serres 2015 and Deleuze 1988, who both approach Leibniz from the perspective of infinitesimal calculus and highlight the importance of his conception of the infinite.

[15] For a fascinating account, see Halpern 2023, 135–141 (translating '*petites perceptions*' as microperceptions). Leibniz's conception of minute perceptions has been used as a heuristic tool in aesthetics (see Cox 2009, Uhlmann 2011, Mori 2012). *Although Leibniz was not entirely free from the cultural biases of his times (see* Smith 2013, Harfouch 2017*), his theory of minute perceptions can also be employed to pursue*

Lowest level of perception:	□ □	[minute perceptions 1 and 2]
Lowest level of inclination:	→ (+1)	[a tiny corporeal point of view, tending towards x: +1]

Fig. 2 The relation between perception and inclination on the most basic level

of which we are not aware; and a noise which we perceive but do not take note of, becomes noticeable"—i.e., passes from an unconscious to a conscious perception—"through a minute addition or increase." (Leibniz 1999, 134) In other words, a series of minute perceptions of which we are unaware is building up slowly until the series becomes prominent enough to become noticeable. Leibniz clarifies this with the help of the example of the roar of the sea:

> …to even better judge the minute perceptions [*des petites perceptions*], which we cannot distinguish within a larger cluster, I often use the example of the roar or the noise of the sea that strikes us when we are standing on the shore. To hear this noise, as we do, we must hear each of the parts composing this whole, that is to say, the noise of each individual wave; even though each of these minute noises [*ces petits bruits*] only makes itself known within that confused composition in which it is merged with all the others; and it would not be noticed if the individual wave, making this minute noise, would be on its own. (Leibniz 1999, 54)

By itself, the minute noise of a single wave would never be noticed; it only becomes noticeable when it clusters with an infinite amount of similar minute noises in a larger assemblage (of which it is a constituting element that remains obscure). Elsewhere he adds the following:

> …at every moment there is an infinity of perceptions in us […] of which we are unaware because these impressions are either too minute and too numerous, or too unvarying so that they are not distinguished enough to stand out on their own; but joined to others, they do not fail to have their effect and to make themselves felt, at least confusedly, within that larger composition. (Leibniz 1999, 53)

From this quote, we can derive three degrees of perceptual awareness: (a) the infinity of minute perceptions of which we remain unaware; (b) unconscious larger clusters of minute perceptions that do not stand out enough yet to penetrate our consciousness (because they are not large enough yet or are too unvarying); (c) conscious compositions that have become noticeable. This brings us to the level of inclination.

On the level of perception, each minute perception has an impact on our corporeal equilibrium. On the level of inclination, this impact manifests itself as a tiny disturbance in the body. This tiny disturbance captures an imperceptibly small segment of our overall inclination. Together, these tiny disturbances ensure that our overall inclination is never stable but is in a perpetual state of unrest. As Leibniz explains, minute perceptions alone do not have a direction or tendency, it is only in the transfer from one perception to another that they either start to tend towards x or to tend away from it. Each transfer from one minute perception to another corresponds, as it were, to a tiny

Footnote 15 (Continued)

imaginative dialogues that engage with the non-human and that address postcolonial issues (see Allewaert 2021*).*

segment of our overall inclination. These tiny segments "that result from unnoticeable perceptions and of which we are not aware," can be understood as infinitely small urges, each of which captures a tiny segment of our general inclination. (Leibniz 1999, 173) Leibniz calls them minute appetitions. On the lowest level of awareness, perception, and inclination relate to each other like this:

a) *The lowest layer of perception:* confused minute perceptions of which we remain unaware (comparable to a single point).[16]
b) *The lowest layer of inclination:* the transfer from one confused minute perception to another gives rise to minute appetitions or tiny corporeal points of view—minuscule segments of our overall inclination—of which we remain unaware (comparable to the tiny segment of a line which connects one point with another, tending in a certain direction x) (Fig. 2).

By analogy with the terminology of Ducrot, we could call these minute appetitions 'tiny corporeal points of view' that generate a polyphony of contrasting urges within the body.[17] Even though these unconscious corporeal points of view, manifest themselves in concrete bodies, they are not yet taken up by an individual, but are pre-individual, providing the conditions in which an individual can occupy a conscious point of view and articulate it as her own.

To better grasp this, let us translate it into a concrete example.[18] Let us assume the following situation: an up-and-coming artist, let us call her Sula, tries to grasp her artistic process. She tends to work chaotically and intuitively, following what she believes to be an authentic approach to art. However, recently, one of her more experienced friends questioned this, highlighting the need for a strategic approach marked by some level of efficiency. In art, it is not uncommon to struggle with these conflicting demands, presenting an eternal dilemma.

From Leibniz's perspective, this dilemma cannot be reduced to simply choosing between two alternatives: pursuing true art or being productive. What appears as a single dilemma should be understood as a continuous interaction between two series, each containing an infinite multitude of tiny perceptions and appetitions. 1. An *artistic authenticity series* (A) that foregrounds ideals like authenticity, artistic vision, and boldness, invoking Sula's conception of what it means to be an artist. 2. A *strategic efficiency series* (S) that foregrounds ideals like punctuality, productivity, and reliability, appealing to daily necessities like food, accommodation, and health care while recalling Sula's hopes to develop a viable career, win prizes, and achieve fame. Remember that this is already a highly reduced picture of Sula's situation. After all, many other series play a role in determining her overall approach to her artistic practice. As it would be impossible to consider all these, I only focus on the two just mentioned.

One minute, Sula is presented with a series of minute perceptions that invoke her aspirations for artistic authenticity (a hint of color, a poetic fragment, a remark from a colleague).

[16] It is not surprising that Leibniz's minute perceptions have been approached as a non-psychological theory of the unconscious, see Otabe 2019, Morejón 2022.

[17] It is somewhat unusual to characterize Leibniz's theory of minute perceptions in terms of an embodied polyphony, but I believe this term captures well what Leibniz has to offer contemporary aesthetics. For another perspective on polyphony in Leibniz, see Kuzmuk 2019.

[18] Leibniz (1999, 184–185), commenting on Locke, uses the example of a drunk. See also Deleuze 1988, 94–96.

Artistic authenticity series (A)

Level of perceptions:	□ □ □	[minute perceptions 1, 2, 3, 4]
Level of inclination:	→ → → (+1) (+1) (+1)	[minute appetitions 1, 2, 3, tending towards A]

Fig. 3 The series of inclinations tending towards artistic authenticity

Strategic efficiency series (S)

Level of perceptions:	□ □ □	[minute perceptions 4, 5, 6, 7]
Level of inclination:	← ← ← (-1) (-1) (-1)	[minute appetitions 4, 5, 6, tending away from A]

Fig. 4 The series of inclinations tending away from artistic authenticity

In the transfer between these minute perceptions, a minute appetitions emerges. These minute appetitions build on each other, and within this series, each strengthens her commitment to artistic authenticity in the smallest of ways (Figs. 3 and 4). In this process, Sula starts to unconsciously tend towards an approach that is solely fueled by artistic authenticity, but only in a very minor way (Fig 3).

The next minute, the warnings of Sula's friend start to manifest themselves again (unconsciously invoked by the lingering smell of her friend's perfume or a glimpse of the cover of the book she recommended), and now a *strategic efficiency series* starts to emerge (fig. 4).

In the complexities of the decision-making process, the two series are still too small to add much force, one way or another. At the same time, they do contribute to this process, however minuscule their contribution might be. They continuously differentiate Sula's overall inclination from within, slowly pushing her first in one direction, then in another. It is crucial to remember that the subseries of minute appetitions are not repetitions of a single motive that stays the same. They correspond to tiny variations within a series tied to a specific context (artistic authenticity; strategic efficiency), and as such, they constantly shift whatever motive or inclination is in the process of building up.

Given the minuteness of the perceptions and appetitions, they always emerge in little clusters that can grow into larger and larger compositions (*ensembles*), "carrying us towards some object or away from it," slowly growing into a "desire or apprehension [*désir ou crainte*]." (Leibniz 1999, 192) The continuous intertwinement of clusters from the artistic authenticity series and clusters from the strategic efficiency series will slowly manifest themselves as desires and apprehensions, of which Sula will become increasingly aware. This indicates that on the level of inclination, we find a similar variety in degrees of awareness as we found on the level of perception. (a) The choices we make first emerge as minute appetitions on the lowest layers. (b) In interaction with each other, these minute appetitions slowly build up into clusters that gain a certain tendency but do not penetrate consciousness yet. (c) At the end of this process, an infinite amount of minute perceptions and minute appetitions will "converge to produce a complete volition [*la volition parfait*], the result of the conflict amongst them." (Leibniz 1999, 192).

The third and last notion that still needs explanation is *inquietude* or unrest. Leibniz explains this notion by using an intriguing image: the balance wheel of a clock.

> In German, the word for the balance wheel of a clock is *Unruhe,* that is to say, *unrest* [*inquiétude*]; it could be said that the same holds for our body, which can never be perfectly at ease; whenever it would be, some new impression of the objects, some minute change [*petit changement*] in the organs, the vessels, and the intestines, would immediately alter the balance [*la balance*] and compel [those parts of the body] to exert some minute effort [*petit effort*] to get back into the best state possible; this results in a perpetual conflict, generating, so to speak, the unrest of our clock [*l'inquiétude de nostre Horloge*]; so that this [German] word is rather to my liking. (Leibniz (1999, 166)

This *Unruhe* or balance wheel provides a good image for the conception of an embodied polyphony that can be derived from Leibniz. From this perspective, the human body is never perfectly at ease but can best be conceived as a continuously shifting spectrum. At each moment, this spectrum is brimming with an infinite number of minute appetitions (imperceptible segments of that overall inclination). The infinite number of minute appetitions are in perpetual unrest and mutual conflict. Therefore, the body is never entirely in balance but is continuously displaced by the implied infinity of appetitions that push it in various directions at once.

Four Dialogical Principles

In this paper, I have laid the foundation for transitioning from the Socratic dialogue (understood as a specific pedagogical conversation technique) to an imaginative dialogue. The Socratic dialogue aims to elucidate the theoretical principles inherent in practical endeavors. For this primarily conceptual undertaking, the model of conversation furnished adequate resources. The imaginative dialogue, however, necessitated a shift from the realm of philosophy to that of the arts. To ensure that this transition proves productive, the model of conversation must be revised. Thus, as a first step towards conceptualizing the imaginative dialogue, it was essential to extend the dialogue beyond the framework of a conversation and provide an account of dialogue that can accommodate the embodied practices of the arts. This enabled me to specify the dialogical principles through which the imaginative dialogue may proceed.

I aimed to trace two different strategies—the strategy of *the dialogic encounter* and the strategy of *internal differentiation*—and to apply them to two different understandings of the dialogue. I referred to these as the verbal dialogue (remaining close to the model of the conversation) and the embodied dialogue (departing from the model of conversation). By adopting this dual approach, I was able to articulate four key dialogical principles. The first dialogical principle was derived from Yakubinsky's conception of the verbal dialogue as a mutual interruption. As I argued, this mutual interruption of a 'not yet' that is always already hindered by an 'already there' introduces a deferred continuity into the verbal dialogue. The imaginative potential of the verbal dialogue inheres within this deferred continuity. Staying within the realm of verbal dialogue but now following the strategy of internal differentiation, a second dialogical principle was formulated: the principle of implied multiplicities. To pursue this, I zoomed in on Ducrot's conception of polyphony. This time, it was not so much the mutual interruption of the encounter that stood out but rather the implied multiplicity of pre-individual points of view already at work in minor utterances.

As a third step, shifting to the realm of embodied dialogue, I focused on how the strategy of the dialogic encounter played out in the works of Martin Buber. As Buber suggests,

die Begegnung, 'the placing opposite of the embodied encounter,' suspends the everyday continuum of time and space and establishes a new temporality. I characterized this temporality through a play on the German word *Gegenwart* as 'the present of a reciprocal waiting-opposite.' Within this new temporalty, a new domain of imaginative potential looms up. Together with the other two dimensions of the embodied encounter, this provides a principle of suspended continuity. In the fourth step, pursuing the strategy of internal differentiation while staying within the realm of embodied dialogue, I turned to Leibniz's theory of minute perceptions. Here, the implied multiplicity in verbal polyphony (Ducrot) is radicalized into the infinite multiplicity of tiny perceptions and tiny appetitions in embodied polyphony. This implied infinity has an incredible imaginative potential. Not only does it contain the germs of a non-psychological conception of unconsciousness (no longer dominated by the subject), but it will also provide a framework for re-conceiving (artistic) sensibility in terms of becoming attuned to minute perceptions/appetitions. It is here that the fourth dialogical principle can be situated.

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