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Transverse Discourse in Jokes about Corinthians Fans / *Discurso transverso em piadas de corintiano*

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ABSTRACT

The article aims at making explicit the relationship between “Corinthians fans” and “poor people” and, subsequently, between “poor people” and “thieves” by analyzing a small *corpus* of jokes. It shows that, from the theoretical/methodological standpoint, this is a case of transverse discourses and from a historical point of view, a case of a long-term discourse, which is rarely fully expressed as such but which still works as a source of prejudiced discourses.

KEYWORDS: Humor; Transverse Discourse; Corinthians Fan; Poor People-Thieves

RESUMO

O artigo pretende explicitar a relação entre “corintiano” e “pobre” e, em seguida, entre “pobre” e “ladrão”, analisando pequeno corpus composto por piadas. Mostra que, do ponto de vista teórico-metodológico, trata-se de discursos transversos e, do ponto de vista histórico, de um discurso de longa duração, eventualmente pouco explicitado como tal, mas que ainda funciona como fonte de discursos preconceituosos. PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Humor; Discurso transverso; Corintiano; Pobre-ladrão

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The poor have to have a sad love for honesty

*Riobaldo*¹

Introduction

In imaginary terms, Corinthians fans are typically poor. This is a stereotype that can be confirmed in many ways. The most obvious is to find out the number of liberal professionals, intellectuals, among others, who, in different circumstances, declare they are Corinthians fans. Nevertheless, it is no mere coincidence that their stadium is situated in Itaquera, in the West side of the city of Sao Paulo. Conversely, the same phenomenon occurs with Sao Paulo soccer team, which is imaginarily a club of the rich with many popular people among its fans, as we can see on the streets and in the stadiums. However, it is also not just a coincidence that their stadium is located in Morumbi, a wealthy district in São Paulo.

An obvious relation, upon which certain jokes are constructed, is the implication “Corinthians fan > poor person > thief / outlaw” found in the two jokes below.

(1) “– Why does Pacaembu’s scoreboard no longer tell the time?

– Because Corinthians fans have already stolen the clock.”

(2) “– Do you know why a Corinthians fan likes to play the cavaquinho² so much?

– Because it's the only instrument one can play in handcuffs.”

One hypothesis is that we should treat these data by addressing stereotypes as pre-constructed forms. In this perspective, it is possible to state that the utterances “Corinthians fans are poor” and “the poor are Corinthians fans” have already been said, or been implicit, “before and elsewhere,” for a long time. It is a matter of postulating equivalence or a belonging (Corinthians fans belong to the group of the poor,³ etc.).

Another hypothesis is to tackle the issue in terms of transverse discourse: instead of equivalence between the two elements or the belonging of an element to a class, a

¹ GUIMARAES ROSA, J. *The Devil to Pay in the Backlands*. Translated by James L. Taylor and Harriet de Onis. New York: Knopf, 1963, p.58.

² Cavaquinho is a small string instrument of the European guitar family with four strings.

³ The verb “to be” allows this dual interpretation: “A = B” or “A belongs to group B.”

relationship between condition (or cause) and consequence should be proposed: “If poor, thus a criminal / an outlaw.” Being handcuffed is another consequence of being a criminal / an outlaw, not equivalence.⁴

This is not just a case of “inferences” or associations made by readers / listeners: there is a legal framework that gives meaning to these sequences. History points to the greater probability of the transverse discourse alternative.

1 A Theory

From the theoretical-philosophical point of view, as it is well known, Pêcheux, following Althusser, defends the thesis that the subject is subjected to/by an ideology through a process called interpellation. Such “affiliation” to an ideology “provides each subject with his ‘reality,’ as a system of evidence and perceived significations - accepted – experienced” (PÊCHEUX, 1975, p.162).⁵ On the other hand, the subject cannot recognize its subordination, since such subjection occurs under the form of autonomy (PÊCHEUX, 1975, pp.162-163).

From the point of view of one aspect of Discourse Analysis theory, namely, ideology materialization in language, Pêcheux conceives of interdiscourse as the space in which two material forms predominantly occur: on the one hand, the pre-constructed, which, in the discourse of the subject, constitutes *the traces of what determines it* (PÊCHEUX, 1975, p.163), and that are reinscribed in his discourse (PÊCHEUX, 1975, p.163) and, on the other hand, the articulations.

According to Pêcheux (1975, p.164), the pre-constructed “corresponds to the ‘ever-already-there’ of the ideological interpellation that supplies-imposes ‘reality’ and its ‘meaning’ in the form of universality.”⁶

Pêcheux specifies that one form of meaning effect is carried out by the relation of substitution between elements (words, expressions, propositions) within a given

⁴ See more detail below.

⁵ Text in Portuguese: “fornece a cada sujeito sua ‘realidade’, enquanto sistema de evidências e de significações percebidas – aceitas – experimentadas.”

⁶ Text in Portuguese: “O pré-construído, diz Pêcheux, corresponde ao sempre já-aí da interpelação ideológica que fornece-impõe a ‘realidade’ e seu ‘sentido’ sob a forma da universalidade.”

discursive formation,⁷ which can take two forms, viz., equivalence, when two or more elements have “the same meaning” and “implication,” or possibility of oriented substitution, when the relation of substitution $A \rightarrow B$ is not the same as the relation of substitution $B \rightarrow A$. As we can see, his examples are drawn from the discourses of geometry and physics, disciplines that provide a more solid assurance that these utterances are of unquestionably univocal and universal value interpretation.

In cases like these, it is not obvious that one can speak of subjection with the same meaning that this concept has in other discourses due to the difference in relation to the process of subjection when it is the effect of an ideology and of a scientific theory. It would probably be necessary to distinguish the two types of subjection as well as the two types of truth. For this purpose, it may be instructive to consider the difference in the role and function of the disciplines (or sciences) and the doctrines. According to Foucault (1971), a discipline “requires only the recognition of the same truths and the acceptance of certain rules” (p.42);⁸ thus, it questions only the utterance, but not the subject. He states that the doctrine, on the other hand, questions the subject through and from the utterance, as can be proved by the procedures of exclusion and mechanisms of rejection. “The discipline conducts a double subjection: of the subjects who speak to the discourses and of the discourses to the group [...] of the individuals who speak” (FOUCAULT, 1971, p.43).⁹

The substitution example that Pêcheux provides is “triangle with one right angle / rectangle triangle” (PÊCHEUX, 1975, p.164).¹⁰ He affirms that the relationship between the two expressions is non-oriented, since it is a relationship of identity (p.164); that is, the two expressions are synonymous.

The other example of substitution is “the passage of an electric current / deflection of the galvanometer” in an “A / B” sequence. The relationship between A and B, in this case, is of causality / determination; that is, the passage of an electric current is the cause or the condition of the galvanometer’s deflection.

⁷ His example is the substitutability between “remarkable” and “bright” in “this mathematician is remarkable / bright” (but not in “the bright light of the beacon blinded him”). That is, it is a question of discourse, possibly of Discursive Formation (PÊCHEUX, 1969, p.95).

⁸ Text in Portuguese: “exige apenas o reconhecimento das mesmas verdades e a aceitação de certa regra.”

⁹ Text in Portuguese: “A disciplina realiza uma dupla sujeição: dos sujeitos que falam aos discursos e dos discursos ao grupo (...) dos indivíduos que falam.”

¹⁰ Text in Portuguese: “triângulo com um ângulo reto / triângulo retângulo.”

Pêcheux adds that “[i]t all takes place as if a sequence Sy were to perpendicularly cross the sequence Sx, containing the substitutable, linking them together by a necessary concatenation” (PÊCHEUX, 1975, p.165).¹¹ It is a *transverse discourse* that is thus “analyzed”:

“The passage of an electric current *causes* the deflection of the galvanometer”

or

“The deflection of the galvanometer *indicates* the passage of an electric current.”

Examples like this can give us the impression that transverse discourse is always obvious and stable. In this case, and in other equivalents cases, the “universal” is hardly debatable.

Nevertheless, this is not the case of ideological discourses, which are accepted as true only by portions of a society (classes?), unlike the discourses of geometry and physics, always taken as effectively universal and even “cultural” discourses, more or less fully accepted by a given society, although not accepted by other societies.

Pêcheux also proposes some analyses that are not exactly similar to the one mentioned above, as it involves basic knowledge about the discourse of electricity. In a text that was originally an (unapproved) research project Pêcheux (1990) reanalyzes a very characteristic “case” of argumentative semantics, a theory basically associated with Ducrot.

Let us follow Pêcheux. In relation to the sequence “Peter is there (A), but John will not see him (B),” he says that Ducrot shows “convincingly” that *but* does not directly connects A and B and that one needs to come up with another utterance, not said, such as in “John will see Peter” (B’), an utterance that is truly in adversative relation with the following *but*: “Peter is there (and therefore John will see or should see him), but John will not see him.”

Pêcheux observes that the critical point rests on the status of B’, and affirms that Ducrot refuses to “make any reference to interdiscursive corpus within the linguistic analysis of this sequence” (1990, p.148).¹² For Ducrot, the sequence includes (only) a

¹¹ Text in Portuguese: “Tudo se passa como se uma sequência Sy viesse atravessar perpendicularmente a sequência Sx que contém os substituíveis, unindo-os por um encadeamento necessário.”

¹² Text in Portuguese: “fazer intervir no interior da análise linguística desta sequência a referência a qualquer corpus interdiscursivo.”

“set of instructions” necessary to decode the significance of this sequence (and even others) in specific contexts.¹³

Pêcheux proposes another analysis for this sequence: one that makes the interdiscourse intervene. His thesis attempts to reconstruct the interdiscursive elements that allow us to introduce the name “John,” considering that “John is there,” as pre-constructed in relation to the presence of Peter and the *transverse connection between* “being there” and “being visible” (“with discursive specification of the optical-physical or social value of the series “to see,” “to be visible”...). For Pêcheux, the central question is the relationship between “being there” and “being visible,” an issue that Ducrot did not consider.

Pêcheux’s thesis is that rather than “inferring” or “calculating” implicit information, both speakers and listeners “discover” it from knowledge that could be translated as such (taking into account what everyone knows about two people who are in the same environment and that one can be seen by other): if Peter and John are in the same place, John should see Peter, but, for some reason, he does not see him. Here are possible examples of the reasons: the setting is divided by walls, which prevents one to see the person who is on the other side ... (which is another knowledge); Peter and John go to this place at different times; or Peter is no longer present when John arrives, for example, because he was called by someone, which is against everyone’s expectations, and John, who would see him in another circumstance, can no longer see him (which is another knowledge ...).

What neither Pêcheux nor Ducrot make explicit is the exact reason, or one of the reasons why John will not see Peter, even though both are there. What may be irrelevant, on the one hand, could explain a certain progression of the text, on the other, either with explanations of the fact by the addresser (sender) or with questions of the addressee (receiver), which can be answered or not. Problems only arise when creating artificial examples, however relevant they may be.

Another example, perhaps more obvious, would be “He went to Rome, but¹⁴ did not see the Pope, because he was visiting Cuba.” This little text is probably more “authentic” than “He went to Rome but did not see the Pope,” which sounds like a

¹³ I am summarizing Pêcheux.

¹⁴ If it were “and did not see,” the interpretation would be basically the same.

school example. Let us explain: if the Pope is in Cuba, he cannot be seen in Rome (not even “from Rome”).

Resorting to what is known (anyone knows) about not being able to see someone at such distance (a transverse discourse), in the case of the Earth, for example, which is round (another fact, which explains the first), is what allows one to explain the meaning of the utterance.

Other cases of “memory,” taken as implicit information, as defended by Achard (1999) and Pêcheux (1999), occur very frequently in narratives, when, for example, the narrator skips part of an episode, and readers / listeners have to deduce it.

The concept of the model reader, coined by Eco (1979), can be evoked here, although he speaks from a generically pragmatic perspective. An example considered in Eco (1994) is very instructive, although it seems only banal. He writes about Sylvie, the novel that is most widely quoted in his conference series.¹⁵ A certain description of one of the trips never mentions the horse. “Doesn’t the horse exist in *Sylvie*, since it does not appear in the text?” (ECO, 1994, p.89).¹⁶ He then shows how incoherent it would be, even without mentioning horses beforehand, a passage, such as “I got out of the carriage and found out that no horse had pulled it along the whole trip” (ECO, 1994, pp.89-90).¹⁷

What Echo is saying is that, in narrating a carriage trip, horses are obvious, even if they are never mentioned. The reader knows this (even the empirical reader). This is a good illustration of what a transverse discourse is (if you travel by carriage, there are horses that move it).

Two excerpts from Rubem Fonseca’s short story *The Taker* (2008)¹⁸ illustrate the same thesis:

(a) “I’m going to have to pull it,” he said. [...] Anesthetic injected into the gum. He showed me the tooth at the tip of the forceps. The root is rotten, see? he said him indifferently. That’ll be four hundred (p.10).”

(b) I stop on Visconde de Maranguape. “Is this where you live?” I get out without saying anything (p.21).”

¹⁵ Eco (1994) brings together his lectures carried out at *Charles Eliot Norton Lectures*, promoted by Harvard University.

¹⁶ Text in Portuguese: “Será que o cavalo não existe em *Sylvie*, já que não aparece no texto?”

¹⁷ Text in Portuguese: “desci da carruagem e constatei que nenhum cavalo a puxara ao longo de toda a viagem.”

¹⁸ FONSECA, R. *The Taker and Other Stories*. Translated by Clifford E. Landers. Rochester, NY: Open Letter, 2008.

The first sequence does not describe all the actions the dentist practices between the acts of administering an injection into the gum and showing the patient his tooth at the tip of the forceps, which are, at least: (a) catching the dental forceps, (b) inserting it into the patient's mouth, (c) holding the tooth, (d) forcing it, (e) pulling it out. The second sequence leaves Ana's response implicit (either affirmative or one that may not have happened, since it was obvious) and Ana's act of getting out of the car.¹⁹

2 Two Jokes

Subsequently, I analyze two jokes in which transverse discourse is crucial. The intention is to show that in order to interpret these texts, a specific memory of a historical nature is mobilized, which can also be called interdiscourse - other theories call it prior knowledge or worldly wisdom. Paveau (2006) proposes that the concept of prediscourse encompasses these (and other) different intuitions. Regarding memory, it is worth quoting the following passage from Pêcheux:

Discursive memory would be something that, in face of a text that emerges as an event to be read, reestablishes the "implicit" (i.e., more technically, the preconstructed, quoted or reported elements, transverse discourses, etc.) necessary for its reading: the condition of being readable in relation to being readable itself (PÊCHEUX, 1999, p.52).^{20 21}

From a theoretical point of view, such data clearly show that language is not a code, or, as a corollary of this thesis, that a text is not encoded. We can read much more than the text says on its surface.

It seems obvious that there are encoded texts and that some texts are more encoded than others: an address, specified by the name of the street and the number of a

¹⁹ We assume that she disembarks because she is close to her residence.

²⁰ Text in Portuguese: "A memória discursiva seria aquilo que, face a um texto que surge como um acontecimento a ler, vem restabelecer os "ímplicitos" (quer dizer, mais tecnicamente, os pré-construídos, elementos citados ou relatados, discursos transversos, etc.) de que sua leitura necessita: a condição do legível em relação ao próprio legível."

²¹ It is certainly the most quoted passage on the subject in works that would follow Pêcheux, even if its details are not really considered. In general, one does not distinguish between the various syntactic or textual mechanisms whereby memory is alluded by- or asks to be evoked, or "is lacking." It is not uncommon that all elements are subsumed by the term "prebuilt"; this is a generic background; it is about any of the various types of implicit information.

residence, for example, provided that it is known in which city the street is, or that the name of the city is also specified; however, it is also true that an address given to someone may be an invitation to a party or to any other gathering. Previous texts can clarify this issue.

Nevertheless, the most interesting texts, at least for Discourse Analysis and some text theories, are the ones that evoke or require other texts. Let us see this fact in the aforementioned jokes:

- (1) “– Why does Pacaembu’s scoreboard no longer tell the time?
– Because Corinthians fans have already stolen the clock.”
- (2) “– “Do you know why a Corinthians fan likes to play the cavaquinho so much?
– Because it's the only instrument one can play in handcuffs.”²²”

It is relevant to start from the beginning, that is, to retake what these texts assume as something known (their interdiscourse). Briefly and schematically:

- a) Corinthians is the team of the people;
- b) “the people” means, in this context, in short, the poor, the popular, and not the inhabitants of a nation (as in “Brazilian people”);²³
- c) the people are poor (hence Corinthians fans are poor);
- d) the people do not study;²⁴
- e) the poor are thieves.²⁵

²² Let us see this variant, which shows that the same discourse repeats itself: - Do you know why the wave of Gaviões da Fiel is perfect? - Because everyone goes to the stadium handcuffed ... There is a variant of this joke with “black” instead of “Gaviões da Fiel,” which indicates the implication “black > thief” (“Gaviões da Fiel”) is the name of a Corinthians association, which is involved in several activities, such as fan clubs, samba school, etc..

²³ TN. The term “people” in Portuguese is ambiguous. Not only does it mean “people” as the inhabitants of a nation, but, depending on the context, it also means the masses (such as in “Give the people what they want”) referring to the poorest. Such ambiguity does not occur in English.

²⁴ Jokes can almost say this directly - Why doesn’t the stadium scoreboard work during Corinthians games? - Because nobody there can really read ... In social networks, a Corinthians shirt image that is full of fingerprints circulates. The subtitles are AUTOGRAPHED SHIRT OF TIMÃO. Well, digital fingerprinting is also the signature of the illiterate...

²⁵ The assertion may be clearer in the joke: - If you’re driving and a person in a Corinthians shirt is riding a bike, why don't you run them over? - Because this could be YOUR bike. Even so, the utterance “poor is a thief” is not necessarily there (it is a case of implicit information, not necessarily materialized, as Achard argues, or a case of memory in the sense of Foucault (1969, p.65): utterances that are no longer admitted or discussed (...), but in relation to which are established ties of affiliation, genesis, transformation, historical continuity and discontinuity.

Considering the first of the two jokes, it is possible to discover that one of the “theses” is almost entirely explicit: “Corinthians fans stole the clock.” Whether we consider the implicit to be “Corinthians fans = poor people” or “poor people → Corinthians fans” or “Corinthians fans → poor people,” the most relevant implicit statement is “the poor stole the clock.”

Now, let us examine the core of the second joke. It is constituted by implicit information that is a transverse discourse: the thief is doomed, because being handcuffed implies being condemned (implication derived from knowledge involved) or, at least, having been arrested.²⁶ Now, if he is in prison, it is because he has broken the law. And the poor violate the law by stealing (and not by murdering or sending money abroad).²⁷ In brief, being arrested (said) is a consequence of having committed an offense (implicit), theft or robbery (another implicit element).

In short, the central “information” of these jokes is not expressed. This is a case of connection or causal relation between poverty and criminality, which is part of a long-term memory. Not even the official data can change this stereotype. It has become a prejudice, that is, a prior concept that is not analyzed. Neither is there any use against it; for example, the abundant information according to which the ones less-indebted are the poorest, the ones who pay their loans the most are the poorest, and that the biggest robberies are not perpetrated by the poor.

The opposite imaginary about a Corinthians fan, at least in São Paulo, is a São Paulo fan, as stated before, who would typically be middle-class or rich (not poor). These two imaginaries are present in the statement of one of the latest president of the club (who, by the way, was banned from the job because of corruption) as he celebrated the return of the player Kaká to São Paulo Club some time ago.

According to him, he was a player “made for the club”: “eloquent, beautiful, not missing any teeth.” Anyone who knows the rivalry between these two clubs (certainly the most heated rivalry in São Paulo nowadays) can “hear,” in this statement, the positive evaluation of one club and a negative evaluation of the other, no matter how implicit it is: it is the club of those who do not speak well, who are ugly and have no

²⁶ There are a lot of prisoners with no judicial sentence of conviction in Brazil.

²⁷ Obviously, this type of text does not call into question the justice of the judiciary system.

teeth - all of them are marks associated to poverty. The only thing left to say was that Kaká had never robbed anything and had never been arrested.

Incidentally, this memory is constantly activated. A good example is the poster that was broadcast by the Federal Police of Brazil on the eve of the Olympic Games as a means of prevention against terrorism: PREVENTION AGAINST TERRORISM in bold red letters. The text says (the sources are diverse, as you can see in the link below²⁸): “Suspicious people wear bags, backpacks, and clothing that are not appropriate to circumstances and weather. They act strange and are highly nervous. Report the fact to the nearest security agent.”²⁹

The comedian José Simão commented on it: “They’ll end up arresting the pizza guy. Or a Corinthians fan” (*Folha Ilustrada*, 7/24/2016).³⁰ What explains it is the similarity of their clothing to that of many poor people, especially if linked to certain groups from outskirts - imaginarily, Corinthians fans.

3 Interdiscourse

Paveau (2013) categorizes the scientific discourse among places of possible lack of discursive morality. He analyzes the short epistemic history of the concept of interdiscourse. His thesis is that it was originally proposed by Pêcheux, as it can be read in Culioli et al. (1970). The crucial passage is the one in which he affirms that, in certain rhetorical events (choice of words and the order of the chain of ideas), it is

interdiscourse (the effect of a discourse on another discourse) as the basis upon which the “strategic mechanisms” mentioned above are organized. This means that we are thus at the level of the “it is spoken” and of the “it speaks,” that is, at the level of the non-conscious (pre-asserted level: lexis and primitive relation) (PAVEAU 2013, p.267 *apud* CULIOLI *et al.*, 1970, p.7, note VII).³¹

²⁸ <http://vejasp.abril.com.br/blog/pop/alerta-de-8220-prevencao-ao-terrorismo-8221-da-agencia-brasileira-de-inteligencia-provoca-polemica-na-internet/>

²⁹ Text in Portuguese: “Pessoas suspeitas usam bolsas, mochilas e roupas destoantes das circunstâncias e do clima. Agem de forma estranha e demonstram intenso nervosismo. Comunique o fato ao agente de segurança mais próximo.”

³⁰ Text in Portuguese: “Vão acabar prendendo o entregador de pizza. Ou então um corintiano.”

³¹ Text in Portuguese: “interdiscurso (efeito de um discurso sobre outro discurso) como base sobre a qual se organizam os ‘mecanismos estratégicos’ mencionados acima. Isto significa que estamos, assim, no nível do ‘fala-se’ e do ‘isso fala’, ou seja, no nível do não consciente (nível do pré-asserverado: lexis e relação primitiva).”

Paveau explains that the notion of interdiscourse arises from psychoanalysis and the hypothesis of the unconscious, or at least from a reflection upon the relationships between psychoanalysis and linguistics (2006, p.267). Therefore, he continues, interdiscourse should be considered as something that is between “the discourse taken into account and the discourse of the other, which impacts the first discourse, effects that are unknown and unrecognized. This trait is even clearer if the interdiscourse, as it claims, has no linguistic materiality although it has ideological materiality” (PAVEAU, 2006, p.268).³²

As it can be seen, this conception of interdiscourse explains why memory, for Pêcheux, has more to do with transverse discourse and with implicit information, in general, than with the resumption of previous statements. The moral question concerns the act of forgetting the author who created the concept, based on which another affiliation is created, also because it implies its transformation, becoming almost a variant of intertext.

In brief, if the relation between what the jokes considered above say and the place from which they come is a relation of the “said” with a transverse discourse, as this work asserts, then it is really a case of interdiscourse, in the sense proposed by Pêcheux. There is no intertextual relationship. What is there is a case of “this speaks / it is spoken,” without occasionally finding a trace of this utterance (occasionally finding its contestation), that only an analysis that makes these concepts work can bring to light.

Conclusion

What we tried to show is that implicit elements may have a specific nature and that it is not appropriate to subsume all their forms in terms of discursive memory or the preconstructed. This common approach turns such concepts fluid, which hampers their power of analysis.

³² Text in Portuguese: “o discurso levado em conta e o discurso outro, que produz efeitos sobre o discurso primeiro, efeitos não sabidos e não reconhecidos. Este traço é ainda mais claro se o interdiscurso, conforme ela afirma, não possui materialidade linguageira, embora tenha materialidade ideológica.”

This is especially true to distinguish cases in which these forms are supported in language (such as the preconstructed, typically materialized in nominalizations and/or in definite syntagma) of those who most clearly demand an interpretation from the analyst (which appears to be the case addressed here).

Moreover, the history of such discourses, especially that of “implicit” ones, is also worth distinguishing. In the present case, the “belief” that the poor are thieves/robbers (elsewhere, that black people are thieves/robbers) belongs to long-life history. This is a thesis that needs to be confirmed.

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