

Reappraising Foucault's Analysis of Authorship in the 21st Century: AI Authorship

Merve Arslan¹

Abstract

The philosophy of AI is one of the new areas of debate in the 21st century. The impact of AI on humans and society, the effectiveness of AI-supported programs, the creativity and originality of AI, the qualities of authorship and artistic activities in AI, copyright issues, identity concerns, and ethical concerns are among the fundamental topics in AI philosophy.

As developments in the field of AI increase, philosophical questions about AI will also inevitably deepen. In this context, this study addresses the authorship of AI. The authorship dimension of AI is subjected to a new evaluation through Foucault's analyses. Could Foucault's thoughts on language, discourse, and authorship help us interpret the authorship qualities of 21st-century AI? What is the meaning and, if any, function of authorship in AI? The article seeks answers to these fundamental questions and offers a different and critical perspective on the authorship of AI.

Introduction

The rapid and unpredictable development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is transforming creativity across various fields. In this context, human narratives have become one of the most critical areas of this transformation. With its comprehensive language models, generative features, and advanced writing tools, AI technology enables the creation of stories that can be designed, written, and understood by humans. As a result of these developments, AI has become an integral part of today's narrative culture.

These advances in AI have not only contributed to the cultural landscape of the 21st century but have also paved the way for several epistemological innovations. The production of human knowledge has evolved beyond purely

1 Öğr. Gör. Dr., Şırnak Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fak., Felsefe ve Din Bilimleri Bölümü/Felsefe Tarihi, mervearslan@sirnak.edu.tr , ORCID ID: 0009-0001-6218-6790.

human-centered explanations and is now being discussed at a transhuman level. Subsequently, the 'human-likeness' of this new form of knowledge, the art of using grammar in the delivery of knowledge, and the encompassing issue of creativity, became the most popular issues in the shift observed in epistemology.

Is AI truly capable of doing authorship? Language programs and automated writing and proofreading tools facilitated the creation of narratives in a relatively short time, sparking discussions about their quality. Compared to human-generated narratives, the competence of works produced through artificial intelligence remains highly debatable. On the other hand, alongside human-generated narratives, there is considerable analysis of the rising tide of AI-generated narratives, just as there is in evaluating human-centered narratives, within the framework of originality, copyright, and ethics. However, another question deserves further investigation: What is the role of the author in the field of artificial intelligence in the 21st century? Or, in other words, how should the authorship of AI be evaluated in this rapidly proliferating and changing epistemic culture? This question forms the fundamental background of this article.

Michel Foucault, one of the most influential thinkers of the 20th century, examined the nature of being an author in his article "*What is an author?*" According to him, the changing epistemic framework throughout the ages provides us with essential insights into authorship. The author has a function within shifting dominant discourses and mirrors them in essence. Drawing on Foucault's analysis, it is possible to infer that the authorship of AI also serves a function that contributes to the discourse. Based on this thesis, the article assesses AI authorship in the 21st century through the lens of Foucault's analysis.

Structurally, the first part of the article describes recent developments in the field of AI in terms of authorship. Next, Foucault's thoughts on the "author," which emerged from his theory of language and discourse, are examined. Then, the author's function is underscored by means of Foucault's analysis. In the final section, it evaluates the rise of AI authorship alongside human-centered authorship through Foucault's account. Ultimately, the article attempts a Foucauldian response to discussions of creativity in AI authorship, interpreting discourses as mediators in the cloud.

1.2. AI Authorship in the 21st Century

AI advancements are among the most striking developments that have marked the 21st century. The field of AI, which has permeated all aspects

of social life, is deeply felt today in numerous areas, including education, healthcare, engineering, sports, and more. Developed to record large amounts of data and facilitate faster information flow, AI technologies have advanced rapidly, achieving their current high level of sophistication.²

At the very beginning, AI was defined as a theory that aims to understand how the human mind works, imitate human intelligence through computer programs, and explore the structure of intelligence by creating computer programs that control machines.³ The most striking topics in the AI field include the possibility of a genuine artificial intelligence, game playing, planning, robot technology, machine learning, natural language processing, and concerns about AI products.⁴

However, the unforeseen pace of technological advancement has transformed the content and meaning of AI to an entirely different level. Today, AI is not only seen as a tool for understanding the human mind and intelligence, but is also being transformed into an entity that can almost replace humans. Although there are still discussions on whether AI can produce works like those of humans, AI can write narratives and create works that resemble those of humans.⁵ Without doubt, these developments are both exciting and thought-provoking. How can an AI, which lacks the same organic⁶ cognitive functions as a human, possess authorship? While AI produces “human-like” products, can it truly produce outputs of “human-like” quality?

When it comes to AI authorship, numerous debates arise, including those surrounding creativity, originality, copyright, and other ethical concerns. Does creativity in AI truly exemplify high-quality and profound creation? Or do we consider creativity a consequence of systems developed with human coding? In this case, how can we address the originality of AI’s narrative products? What approach should we adopt when the possibility exists that

2 You may see more, for instance in Lungarella, M. et al. (2007), ‘AI in the 21st Century – With Historical Reflections’, Asif Farooq Zai et al. (2024) ‘Artificial Intelligence In The 21st Century: Opportunities, Risks And Ethical Imperatives Educational Administration: Theory and Practice’, and Müller, Vincent C. (2025) ‘Ethics of Artificial Intelligence and Robotics’.

3 The field of artificial intelligence (AI) was officially started to work in 1956 and launched by a DARPA-sponsored summer conference at Dartmouth College, in Hanover, New Hampshire (Bringsjord, 2024).

4 For some of the discussions, you may go further with Jung G. (2020) ‘Do Androids Dream of Copyright? Examining AI Copyright Ownership’ and Touiserkani, M. (2025) ‘The Authorship Paradox: How AI Collaboration Is Redefining Creativity in the Digital Age’.

5 For an interesting examination of the first AI Novel, namely, *I the Road*, you may see in Murphy P. (2023) *Writers and Writers of Writers: Creativity and Authorship in the First AI Novel*

6 We will retouch to this comment in the last part of the study.

multiple AIs might produce similar work? How can copyright and ethical issues be evaluated in this situation? As can be seen, AI authorship raises many questions for discussion.

Amidst so much debate, perhaps we need to reflect on the fundamental rationale of AI and the content of its narratives. Approaching AI authorship from a philosophical perspective allows us to question the epistemological shift that has restructured meaning in the 21st century. In conducting such an investigation, it may be practical to evaluate AI authorship by comparing it with human authorship. In this context, for example, Foucault's ideas on language, discourse, and authorship can be considered to rethink the meaning of AI authorship in the 21st century.⁷ Therefore, in the next section of the study, we will explore Foucault's theory through his ideas on language, discourse, and, subsequently, authorship.

2. Foucauldian Account of Language and Discourse

Michel Foucault (1926-1984) is one of the most significant figures in 20th-century French philosophy, with a profound influence on the disciplines of philosophy, sociology, psychology, history, and linguistics. Whereas he is associated with the structuralist and the post-structuralist waves among his contemporaries in the philosophy of language, he shapes his own ideas about language in relation to the theory of discourse by following a different line (Gutting, 2014). He claims that discourse manifests itself in the form of linguistic units; thus, our thinking, speaking, and writing essentially depend on the effect of the dominant discourse in a society (Foucault, 2002).

At first glance, the theory of discourse lies at the heart of Foucault's philosophy of language. While he investigates language deeply in terms of the history of thought, he also highlights the relationship between language and discourse in *The Order of Things* and *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Foucault describes discourse as a determinant element of a language. For him, it is also related to human knowledge and its meaning throughout history. To demonstrate this, Foucault analyzes human knowledge and its representation in language. Thus, it is crucial to revise their relationship in order to understand how discourse reveals itself at the heart of Foucault's thoughts (Gutting, 2014).

7 There are some studies which is based on Foucault's account and used in some similar areas to understand AI from different aspects. For example, Martínez-Ávila, D. et al. (2015). What is an Author now? Discourse analysis applied to the idea of an author' and Puşcaşu, I. (2024) 'Creating With AI: On Recent Debates About Authorship Revisiting the Influence of Barthes and Foucault'

At the beginning of *The Order of Things*, Foucault provides a comprehensive analysis of the meaning of human knowledge and its evolution, from the Renaissance to the present. Given the breaks and transformations in the history of thought, he believes that human language represents knowledge differently in each period. These transformations can be viewed in terms of epistemic periods. In this regard, the mainstay of *The Order of Things* is these epistemic periods and breaks in the relationship with language. “Episteme”, as a term, refers to the basis of thought and the scientific or approved discourse of a particular time. With this term, Foucault points to the stable groups of unspoken rules that govern knowledge. These rules create all meanings as well as knowledge in an episteme. Hence, the meanings of words, things, and works are changeable according to the episteme in which we live. This means that each age has a distinct discourse, and it is impossible to understand a discourse by looking at it from another discursive perspective due to the differences in meaning (Kelly, 2014).

In *The Order of Things*, Foucault distinguishes three types of epistemes, which include huge differences in terms of knowledge and its representation in Western thought. Firstly, he points out the sixteenth century. He argues that Western knowledge was quite disorganized in the sixteenth century. The world was thought of as a space full of codes, and this world needed to be deciphered. The resemblances were used to make the things understandable. The world could be interpreted with the help of language. For instance, a walnut could be a good cure to get rid of a headache, because the walnut’s shape was similar to that of the brain. This shape was also a clue that helped us solve the walnut’s code (Foucault, 2002, Part 2).

According to Foucault, with the advent of the Classical age, we faced the first break in the seventeenth century. In this era, distinct distinctions between academic disciplines emerged, and knowledge was categorized according to observations about the world. Language was used to represent only observable things transparently. Therefore, language could be grasped as a tool to clarify visible things. Lastly, from the beginning of the nineteenth century, a new tendency emerged due to the second break in the history of knowledge. A new search began to uncover what is hidden from our view. In this tendency, hidden logics were called in language. In conclusion, language was used to interpret the world, to represent things, and to find meaning in the history of thought (Foucault, 2002, p.227).⁸

8 Foucault highlights the differences between these two interpretations. The first interpretation sought to uncover the hidden word of God in the sixteenth century, whereas the nineteenth-century interpretation focused on knowledge itself (Foucault, 2002).

After pointing out the distinct epistemic breaks in the history of thought, Foucault approaches language in terms of discrete linguistic events or statements in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. In this analysis, he deals with statements that depend on the conditions in which they emerge and exist within a specific discourse. In this regard, he investigates collections of statements or discursive formations within their historical context using his archaeological method. Foucault treats texts as the excavation of an archive, exploring how statements create a network of rules in terms of meanings, utterances, and grammatical issues within each discourse. These rules provide us with correctness and consistency in the meaning of a discourse (Foucault, 1969, pp. 155-156).

Foucault concludes that there are formations and transformations within each discourse, which means that each discourse has its own dynamic structure. Thus, to understand a discourse, we should focus only on its discursive world, because it has its own linguistic units and statements which supply us with meaning, utterance, and grammatical structure. These features can change in a discourse according to the dominant ideas. For instance, when we read texts written in different years in the Classical episteme, we can notice some basic linguistic forms and discursive utterances of the given age. Additionally, we can observe that they can be distinguished from any other episteme.

When evaluating Foucault's approach to language in general, one could think that he examines language by pointing to its relationship with discourse. His approach to language differs in method, specifically through archaeological analysis, from that of his contemporaries. He thinks of language not in terms of its formal structure, but in relation to discourse. That is why he focuses on the discursive sides of language and asks himself how discourse directs knowledge and the meaning of life throughout history. To examine this point, Foucault considers language archaeologically and linguistically. Similar to Nietzsche, he rejects the idea of progressivism in historical analysis, in contrast to conventional historical approaches. By illustrating the breaks and transformations in human knowledge, he demonstrates that human knowledge and language evolve in response to the prevailing thoughts (Gutting, 2014).

It is possible to interpret that the main characteristic of discourse is to determine human knowledge. However, because discourse produces knowledge through language, it also has power over social behaviors. In this sense, discourse is used not only in a linguistic sense but also with a social meaning that is intertwined with social behaviors. This is because discourse

determines what human beings can think, speak, and write, according to Foucault's account. In turn, discourse transforms human beings' thoughts and behaviours. In this regard, it is located beyond texts, and the meaning of life is created only by discourse. As a consequence, it produces the subjects and the objects in each episteme in a different discursive style (Hall, 1992).

For Foucault, the producer of human knowledge can be interpreted as discourse. On that point, one question arises: What is the role of the human being in the theory of discourse for Foucault? It seems that the subject is located only as an object in his theory of discourse. Even if human beings create the discourse, they melt into the discursive world. They, in other words, depend on discourse. It is possible to say that subjects bear the knowledge which is produced by discourse, and each human being's entity is located according to the discursive context. This means that subjects cannot be excluded from discourse because they are embedded in discursive power (Hall, 1997).

According to Foucault, controlling and limiting discourse ensures its continuity. By controlling the content of a discourse, excluding inappropriate words and expressions ensures the continuity of the existing discourse. For example, we maintain forms of exclusion within society through prohibition, expulsion, and the distinction between truth and falsity (Foucault, 1981, pp. 53-55). On the other hand, there are also ways to control discourse internally. For example, interpreting a discourse frees it from internal arbitrariness and ambiguity. Although a given discourse has multiple interpretations, people remain within the same discourse frame without any arbitrariness in its meaning. To Foucault, interpretation means limiting discourse because it repeats things in the same way over and over again (Foucault, 1981, pp. 56-57).

In *The Order of Discourse*, Foucault considers interpretation in relation to the concept of the author. The author is a supporting element of the interpretive method, as he strives to ensure coherence and unity in a discourse. In other words, Foucault considers the author as the principle of integration and unity, or the root of meaning. Consequently, the author is positioned as the source of coherence in a discourse (Foucault, 1981, p.64). Here, Foucault does not accept the concrete existence of the author as an author. The author has a space within the discourse as an author. However, the author must consider the coherence and unity of the works published under his or her name. This represents this represents another means of

liberating discourse from arbitrariness and controlling it (Foucault, 1981, p. 64).⁹

Foucault's thoughts on language and discourse have been framed so far. Discourse influences people in social life. It has a power over them, from their thoughts to their speech. While we consider humans as the creators of discourse, what we emphasize remains the discourse itself. Discourse encompasses all aspects of human existence. The author can also be seen as a controlling and limiting factor within discourse. In other words, the author has a function within the discourse, protecting and sustaining it. To better understand the place and characteristics of the author in Foucault's thought, it is helpful to examine his article, which focuses on the idea of the author. Therefore, the following section examines Foucault's ideas in his article.

3. What Does Foucault Mean by 'Author'?

Foucault first takes Samuel Beckett's question: 'What matter who is speaking?' in his article. For Foucault, this disregard is related to ethical issues in contemporary writing. This is because writing refers to itself today, instead of to the author. Writing is not the instrument for the expression of the author's own emotions or ideas; today, it is only a circulation of language (Foucault, 1977, p.115).

For Foucault, writing is often viewed as a means of coping with death in Western culture. To achieve immortality, authors must erase their individual traces and assume the role of death in their writing. However, to Foucault, if we surely accept that the author is dead, we might miss some points in saving the privileged position of the author in writing. We cannot discern the true meaning of the author's absence (Foucault, 1977, p. 117).

In fact, according to Foucault, the privileged position of the author must be preserved. According to him, a certain degree of anonymity can be offered to the author. Since an author's name is specifically described, it can raise some problems. For example, Shakespeare is a well-known author and is known for his famous sonnets. However, when examining Shakespeare's lesser-known sonnets or a rare work that differs significantly from his other works, the function of the author's name changes. If we encounter a Shakespearean work that we find unrelated to its form and content, we may

9 In addition to those ways counted, communities and doctrines can be used to control and protect the meanings within a discourse. For example, the main communities and doctrines within a discourse limit the number of subjects speaking within that discourse. In this way, speakers pay attention to what they say and the prevailing rules that apply within a given discourse. This limits people's speech (Foucault, 1981, p.63).

lose Shakespeare's voice in that work. Therefore, unlike past practice, where the author's name or signature was important as a referent, today it can be considered more important to be part of the existing discourse (Foucault, 1977, p. 122).

Foucault, who considers the author solely as the author of the text, believes that the author's function is primarily to participate in and sustain the discourse. Authors reflect the discourse in their texts. In this context, the function of the writer is to reflect the field of discourse (Foucault, 1977, p.123). According to Foucault, there are certain aspects to consider when analysing author function. Firstly, the author's function shows the existence and formations of a discourse within the text. In addition to this, the author function is defined not by the natural attribution of a text to its creator but by means of a series of complex procedures related to discourse. Moreover, the author function does not refer primarily to one person in a text, because the text encompasses multiple selves within itself. In this regard, these selves could be an author, a fictional speaker, or a school. The author's function also shows this differentiation (Wilson, 2004).

In this respect, Foucault considers the author's creativity as a crucial issue in relation to discourse. According to him, we should reorganize our ideas of an author as both the creator of the work and the producer of meaning in their writing. For Foucault, the author is not a source for their work. The author, only as a principle, chooses the concepts and limits them according to the present discourse. Today, the author's function is fading, and all discourse includes the absence of authors. Thus, instead of asking 'Who is speaking?' we should ask 'What matters who is speaking?' (Foucault, 1977, p.138).

In evaluating Foucault's 'author function', it is first possible to say that it demolishes the idea that the author is the creator of work with his or her own intention and expression. The author reflects only the present discourse by limiting and selecting elements in that discourse. On that point, the role of limiting a text seems compatible with Foucault's idea of the author's function. As mentioned in part of *The Limits of Discourse* above, the author has the role of limiting discourse in order to save it from arbitrariness and incompatible ideas, which may contradict discourse. Additionally, to be in harmony with the discourse, the author selects the elements to format the text. In this format, discourse remains a crucial standpoint.

As described in the previous part, discourse determines the thoughts; thus, it is inevitable to reflect the present discourse, common ideas, or beliefs in writing. When authors write texts, they inevitably reflect the discursive

elements. They live in a discursive world. Speaking through their individual freedom or intention in writing, in contrast to discourse, is not plausible in this respect. Even if they assert their individual existence in writing, they will again be part of the same discursive world by thinking, speaking, and writing according to the discourse, essentially because their ideas and intentions are shaped by it.

Secondly, it is worth noting that Foucault's concept of the author is often compared with that of Roland Barthes in the history of philosophy. In *The Death of the Author*, Barthes announces the death of the author in writing. He thinks that when authors write their texts, they have no control over the text (Barthes, 1982, pp. 185–193). This is because their voices disappear in the writing, and the readers become the centre in the interpretation of texts (Barthes, 2002, pp. 221–224). Here, it should be remembered that the author function works for discourse in Foucault's theory, without dying, but continuing as only a name (the author) and a function.

Thirdly, there are some additional comments on his account regarding his conceptual framework. In terms of notions such as 'the author' and 'the author function', some researchers think that Foucault gets confused. Although he begins his search by inquiring about what an author is, he then highlights the author's function in his account. Alexander Nehamas argues that the reason for this is Foucault's failure to maintain his distinction between the writer and the author in his account. Foucault confuses the writer of a text with its author or authors, as if all authorship were reducible to the construction of historically exact literary agency (Nehamas, 1981).

According to Lamarque, Foucault considers the issues of an author's design and creative power, in addition to meaning and expression. For Foucault, these features can be thought of as being directly related to an authored text without any reference, which suggests the idea of the author-as-person. For Lamarque, he speaks as if he is still thinking of the author-as-person behind and beyond the work. This is because Foucault begins with the call of the privileged space of the author, and he finds it to be the author function. However, Foucault ultimately fails, due to the term 'author', which is connected to the terms 'author-function' and 'authored-text' (Lamarque, 1990, pp. 319–331).

Again, when his theory of discourse and the author function are considered deeply, it can be said that their relationship seems logical and consistent in Foucault's account. Foucault situates discourse within the framework of language theory from the outset. Then, by highlighting the importance of discourse, he establishes his theory of authorship. In contrast

to authorship theories such as the announcement of the author's death, he raises his own voice and points out the author's function in discourse and in writing (Compagno, 2012, pp. 37–53). Although the author's freedom and intention seem problematic in this account, it is again in harmony with Foucault's general analysis related to discourse.

To limit and save discourse, the author has several functions in the formulation of texts. By reflecting discourse, in fact, the author bears the fundamental role, because the author lives in the discursive platform, with the common ideas and beliefs of the time. Thus, it is ordinary to share them with the readers through the way of writing. Even if one assumes that the author has their freedom and conveys their own intention in the text, they will still be expressing their thoughts influenced by the dominant discourses.

In fact, we can offer a reading of Foucault's theory in relation to the evolving epistemic paradigm of the 21st century, particularly in the context of AI authorship. Authorship has undergone a significant transformation in the 21st century due to the emergence of AI. While authorship retains its value and meaning, it has also taken on a digital form. As we know today, AI can write a book or produce a literary work by scanning literature. However, from the perspective of Foucault's theory, it is clear that AI, like human authors, cannot create original works within the dominant discourses. To evaluate this thesis, the final section of the article examines artificial intelligence authorship through Foucault's analysis.

4. Reappraising Authorship in AI via Foucault's Views

When developments in artificial intelligence and the rapidly rising ranks of AI writing are reevaluated in light of Foucault's analyses, the place and function, if any, of AI today begin to be questioned. How can we evaluate AI's increasingly sophisticated writing capabilities, which surpass those of humans? Can AI's writing be considered original? Finally, what does AI aim to achieve through its authorship? This final section of the article will touch upon these questions and invite the reader to reconsider contemporary AI authorship from a different perspective.

First and foremost, how can we evaluate AI's increasingly sophisticated writing capabilities? When considering some AI texts, we can view that they seem as if they are generated from almost the same program using the exact words or sentences. Although search engines sometimes display the specific name of an AI for those texts or works, the author can generally be considered as an AI. In this case, can we say that the presence of AI in these works indicates anonymity? Perhaps, despite the changing episteme

in the 21st century¹⁰, the meaning and function of authorship can be grasped through a Foucauldian reading. While AI, which is rapidly rising in parallel with humans, may appear to us with the qualities of writers, poets, composers, and so on, these acquired qualities will be the result of discourse guiding them. In this case, it may be more valuable to try to understand the real purpose of these narratives, rather than who or which AI wrote them.

For just as it is challenging to capture a human author within discourse, with their subjectivity and free ideas, the creativity and freedom of an AI author will likewise remain a matter of debate. Since it is inconceivable that a human-made AI could think and create a work with its own organic existence and perception of the world¹¹, it is clear that AI authors, who produce texts through discourse, will be subject to limited evaluation as well. If AI has been compared to the human mind since its inception, then Foucault's analyses of the authorship function can also be reflected in AI authorship.

As we have attempted to point out in previous sections, while human authors cannot express their own ideas dominantly in a text, they can organically reflect their perceptions in the era in which they exist. However, AI writers address the same issues in a way that we cannot consider inherently organic. They construct expressions based on discourses encoded within them. It is because AI authorship can be conceived of as the automatic selection process of language and codes through the use of cloud-based literature reviews.

Therefore, there is an organic and nuanced difference between human and AI writers in terms of authorship. Nevertheless, they both can serve as mirrors of the epistemic era or period in which they find themselves. In other words, both writers (human and AI) fulfil a discursive function. Hence, while AI authorship has been a rising trend in recent years, it can be argued that it serves as a carrier and controlling mechanism of discourse, just as it does with human writers.

10 For a good assessment of the epistemic change in the 21st century, you may see more in Lockhart, E. N. S. (2025) 'From Search to Synthesis: Generative AI, Internet Use, and the Transhuman Epistemic Shift'.

11 The expression of the 'organic' comes from John Searle's idea of the human brain. He believes that the brain is a biological structure in humans that enables the mind to exist. If it is so, how can a physical and artificial system with its formal and abstract structure have a mind like a human? For Searle, it is impossible (Searle, 1980, pp. 3-37).

Conclusion

This study examines the authorship of AI, a highly controversial topic in recent years. Drawing on Foucault's theory, we explore the nature of authorship in AI and its function within discourse. Discourse, as discussed in Foucault's critical theory, is examined and understood in its relationship with language. When discourse is considered as a network encompassing all aspects of human individual and social life, it is clear that the human author is not present in writing but cannot manifest themselves indifferently within discourse.

Relying on the central thesis of our article, we interpret these readings of Foucault in terms of the authorship of AI today. It can be thought that the author, as an AI, cannot express themselves in writing as an identity. Furthermore, when compared to a human author, their creativity remains a subject of controversy. Since an author, as an AI, cannot interact with the world by establishing their own organic perceptual connections. Considering all these points outlined so far, it may be possible to consider the meaning attributed to the authorship of AI more carefully and to open up discussion about the real function of the author as an AI.

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