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# CORE ISSUE – *ORIENTATIONS*, HOMAGE TO PIERRE BOULEZ

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## A BIOGRAPHY OF BOULEZ AS A MUSIC WRITER

**Abstract:** In the period from 1948, the writings of Pierre Boulez were published in several languages and in over forty magazines of art and contemporary music. They were also published in the programmes for concerts *Domaine musical*, for the performances of Wagner's pieces in Bayreuth, in over sixteen booklets for the editions of the records on "new music", in the forewords for different studies, in five collections printed in several volume – amounting to over a hundred and thirty texts. The number of publications of Boulez articles is, however, almost four times as many as the number of titles, since a lot of texts were published several times and translated into other languages in different magazines or collections. This text follows the chronology and history of the shaping and multiplication of Boulez writings in detail. The sheer size of theoretical work and its diverse trajectories point to the importance of Boulez work as a music writer not only for understanding his work as a composer and a conductor, but also for the whole theoretical climate in the post-war modernist world of art he experienced.

**Key words:** Boulez, journals, collected writings, autopoetic discourse, post-war modernism

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## **A Biography of Boulez as a Music Writer**

Aside from composing, Pierre Boulez developed his skills as a conductor and music writer being equally important. His first writings, as a twenty-three-year-old composer, were published in a French magazine *Polyphonie* in 1948. The articles in question were “Incidences actuelles de Berg” and “Propositions”. The following year, Boulez’s text “Trajectoires” appeared in the magazine *Contrepoints*. In the fifties, this magazine published another of his texts: “Moment de Jean Sébastien Bach” (1951). In that same decade, two of Boulez’s articles were published in *La Revue Musicale* (“Éventuellement...”, “Satie: Chien flasque” /1952/), and *La nouvelle revue française* printed three of his texts (“Recherches maintenant” /1954/, “Éxpérience, autruches et musique” /1955/ i “Alea” /1957/). Already in this period, Boulez’s writings were being presented in other languages as well: the magazine *Score* published the article “Schoenberg is Dead” in 1952, and *Die Reihe* published “An der Granze der Fruchtländes” in 1955.

In the focus of the aforementioned magazines that published Boulez’s texts during the fifties and the sixties were issues of contemporary music. Magazines were founded immediately after World War II, but they ran for several years only. *Polyphonie* stopped publishing after the second issue in which Boulez’s articles were published, i.e. two years after its first issue. *Contrepoints* was in print from 1946 to 1951, but irregularly. The first five issues appeared during 1946; the following issue, in which two of Boulez’s works were published, was not printed until 1949, whereas the last, the seventh issue, dedicated to the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Bach’s death, was published two years later. The fact that Boulez received a call from the editor of the American magazine *Score* to give his contribution to commemorate Schoenberg’s death, shows that Boulez was already back then accepted not only as a composer and conductor, but also as a music writer even outside Europe.

Of extreme importance for the development of Boulez’s international composing and conducting career was his work in the Renaud-Barrault theatre group, which performed contemporary theatre pieces in a Paris theatre, the Théâtre Marigny. In the orchestra of the theatre, Boulez played the Ondes Martenot, and very soon, even though he was only twenty-six years old, he became the group’s music director. Along with writing his first papers about music, it was the performance of the theatre music of Georges Auric, Francis Poulenc, Darius Milhaud, Henri Souguet and Jacques Offenbach within the Renaud-Barrault group that enabled Boulez to gain his first conducting experience. Thanks to the international performances of the group, Boulez assumed the role of the conductor and player of the Ondes Martenot not only all over France, but also in Germany, and South (the tour of 1950) and North America (the tour of 1952). In 1952,

Boulez started organizing and conducting contemporary music concerts at the music hall of the Marigny theatre building. This concert society named *Domain musical*, in time became the leading institution for promoting the new music.<sup>1</sup> In this regard, Joan Peyser, for example, wrote that Boulez had no competition in the fifties in terms of his work as a critic, and that his first concert in America in 1952 with the Renaud-Barrault theatre group was attended by the most significant painters of abstract expressionism of the time.<sup>2</sup> The publication of the first issue of the German magazine *Die Reihe*, with its theme focused on at first serial, and then on electronic music, was marked by Boulez's contribution as an author. Even though this magazine came out annually until 1962 with Stockhausen as its editor, Boulez's text was printed only in one issue. The reason for this might have been the dissent in the theoretical thought of the two composers regarding certain aesthetic questions in the sixties of the last century.

The number of publications which printed Boulez's work increased from the sixties and the seventies. They were still some of the most significant magazines for the promotion of contemporary music in French, English and German of which the most notable ones were: *Musique en jeu* ("Style ou idée – éloge de l'amnésie" /1971/, "Sur *Polyphonie X* et *Poésie pour pouvoir*" /1974/), *Perspectives of New Music* ("Sonate, que me veux-tu?" /1963/), *The World of Music* ("Musique traditionnelle – un paradis perdu" /1967/), *Music and Musicians* ("Frozen Perfection" /1968/), *Journal of the Arnold Schoenberg Institute* ("Through Schoenberg to the Future" /1977/, "The Composer Creativity" /1988/), *Die Welt* ("Tell me" /1970/, "Schoenberg, le mal-amié" /1974/), *Anhaltpunkte* ("Le chef d'orchestre et son modèle", "L'intermédiaire" /1975/). However, from the seventies on, Boulez's works were also published in some French magazines whose focus was not only music: *Tel Quel* ("Le goût et la fonction" /1963/), *Mercure du France* ("Nécessité d'une orientation esthétique" /1964/), *Les Lettres Nouvelles* ("Discipline et communication" /1964/), *Les Lettres française* ("Periform", "Wieland Wagner" /1966/), *Le Nouvel observateur* ("Hermann Scherchen: un partiarche aventureux", "Pourquoi je dis non à Malraux" /1966/, "Salut à Bruno Maderna" /1973/).

Each of the aforementioned magazines most often published one, or at most two, of Boulez's works. However, the German magazine *Melos* is an exception

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Boulez on Conducting* (Conversation with Cécile Gilly), trans. by Richard Stokes, London, Faber and Faber Limited, 2003 3–4; *Boulez – Cage Correspondance et documents*, ed. by Jean-Jacques Nattiez, trans. by Robert Samuels, Cambridge University Press, 1993, 156; Joan Peyser, *To Boulez and Beyond: Music in Europe Since The Rite of Spring*, New York, Billboard Books, 1999, 213–215.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Joan Peyser, op. cit., 146, 191.

to this rule. From 1955 to 1970, this monthly magazine published sixteen of Boulez's texts. Five of his works were published in the fifties ("Einsichten und Aussichten" /1954/, "Der Vogel Strauss im labor", "Le corruption dans les encensoirs" /1955/, "Son, verbe, synthèse" and "Hommage à Messiaen" /1958/), whereas from 1960 to 1970, his texts were published once a year ("Alban Berg heute gescheen" /1960/, "Wo ist echte Tradition?" /1954/, "T. W. Adorno" /1969/, "Visage de l'amitié" /1970/). This was not the case in 1962 and 1963, when two works were published each year ("Dans la distance", "Général Debussy-eccentric" /1962/, "Poésie – centre et absence – musique", "Gespräch'unter zwei Augen" /1963/), as well as in 1965 and 1968 when they published none.

Boulez's long-lasting cooperation and friendship with the magazine's editor, Heinrich Strobel, and its founder, Pierre Souvtchinsky, probably resulted in the many years of publishing of Boulez's articles in *Melos*. Strobel had cooperated with Boulez as a music director of the festivals in Baden-Baden and Donaueschingen since 1951, whereas Piere Souvtchinsky had a crucial role in the founding of the concert society *Domain Musical*. Two periodicals followed the contemporary music concerts of *Domain Musical: Cahiers de la Compagnie Madelaine Renaud–Jean-Louis Barrault* and *Domain Musical*. The first one published four of Boulez's texts in the period from 1954 to 1958 ("...Auprès au loin", "La musique et ses problèmes contemporains", "Première et seconde audition", "Son et Verbe"), and then two more in the reissue in 1963 ("*Pierrot lunaire* et *Le Marteau sans maître*", "Dix ans après"). Descartes, Jean Barraqué, Fano, Antonin Artaud, Henri Pousser, Stockhausen, Henri Michaux, Armand Gatti, Pierre Schaeffer, Suri, Antoine Goléa, René Char, Boris de Schloezer and Souvtchinsky were some of the other authors.<sup>3</sup> Boulez enthusiastically noted in his correspondence with Cage that this journal, although a "specialized journal", sold out beyond all expectations the whole circulation of four thousand copies.<sup>4</sup> It seems that Boulez already accomplished more than he had expected by the year of 1954 because not only was contemporary music performed and listened to, but the audience also followed written articles about it. Encouraged by the success of the publication, Boulez and Souvtchinsky founded another magazine in that same year, 1954, called *Domaine musical*, which followed the same direction as the previous one, but had a "far less manifest character."<sup>5</sup> The list of authors remained the same, and Cage's contribution was planned for the second issue, and for the first and only issue, Boulez wrote a homage to Webern ("Hommage à Webern") and a text which problematized how active the composer was

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. *The Boulez–Cage Correspondence*, op. cit., 48.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

in the role of a musical writer (“Probabilités critiques du compositeur”). The circle of Boulez’s co-workers in the aforementioned two magazines dealt not only with issues of contemporary music, but also of modern theatre and poetry. Many of them, just like Boulez, actively promoted “new” music in the written discourse: Fano published a book about *Wozzeck* in 1953, Pousser, Stockhausen and Schaeffer wrote numerous theoretical texts, Suri founded a magazine and published a study about music in 1976, Goléa wrote the first monograph about Boulez in 1958, and de Schloezer acted as an editor of the magazine *La Revue Musicale*, a columnist in *Nouvelle revue française* and in 1959, co-authored with Marina Scriabin, a study called *Problèmes de la musique moderne*. Souvtchinsky was especially active in the field of publishing: he founded not only *Melos*, but also the magazines *Le contemporain musical* in Russia, *Eurasie* in Prague, he wrote the study *Un siècle de musique russe* and assisted Stravinsky in his writing of *Poétique musicale*. Souvtchinsky edited the series of publications called *Domaine musical*, in which letters to Debussy were published, as well as correspondence between Nietzsche and Gast, Pousser’s translation of Berg’s works and a collection of essays by Roger Desormière. Another of Boulez’s texts came into being as a result of the cooperation with Souvtchinsky – the analysis of Stravinsky’s *The Rite of Spring* (“Stravinsky demeure”) in 1953 was written in *Musique russe* in two volumes, edited by Souvtchinsky.

The magazines in fact represented only one area of publication, albeit the biggest one, in which Boulez worked as a musical writer. The second area consisted of his writing contributions for the aforementioned *Musique russe*, then the French *Encyclopédie de la Musique*, for which he wrote a series of entries in the late fifties,<sup>6</sup> the texts for a monograph about *Lulu*<sup>7</sup> and the forewords to two studies about Mahler and two about Wagner in the period from 1975 to 1980.<sup>8</sup> The third area of Boulez’s activity as a music writer is directly linked with his work as a conductor. Those are texts in whose titles 20<sup>th</sup> century composers and their works are often mentioned. For the audience at the concerts of *Domaine*

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<sup>6</sup> The entries in question are: “Accord”, “Cage”, “Chromatisme”, “Concrète /musique/”, “Conterpoint”, “Bela Bartok”, “Alban Berg”, “Claude Debussy”, “Série”, “Arnold Schönberg”, “Anton Webern”.

<sup>7</sup> “Lulu: le second opera” and “Lulu: court post-scriptum sur la fidélité” for the study *Alban Berg: “Lulu”*, Vol. 2, Paris Lattès, 1979.

<sup>8</sup> “Richard Wagner: the Man and the Works”, foreword to the study: Herbert Barth, Dietrich Mack, Egon Voss (Eds.), *Wagner: A Documentary Study*, London, Themes and Hudson, 1975; “La biographie, pourquoi?”, foreword to the study of author Henry de la Grande, *Mahler*, Vol. 1, Paris, Fayard, 1979; “Mahler actuel?”, foreword to *Gustav Mahler et Vienne* by Bruno Walter, Paris Librairie Générale Française, 1979; “Histoire d’un Ring”, for: *Der Ring des Nibelungen Richard Wagner, Bayreuth, 1876–1980*, Paris, Robert Laffont, 1980.

musical from 1957 to 1965 and then at the Bayreuth Festival during the seventies, Boulez comments on the repertoire which he conducted (“Petit editorial” /1957/, “Une classe et ses chimères” /1959/ and “Arcanes Varèse” /1965/ for concerts at the *Domaine musical*, i.e. “Chemin vers *Parsifal*”, “Le temps de re-cherché” /1970/, “*Parsifal*: la première rencontre” /1973/ and “Commentary on Mythology and Ideology” /1977/ for the performance of *Siegfried*, *Das Rheingold* and *Parsifal*). Aside from this, for the audience that listened to his interpretations of contemporary music in the period from 1956 to 1980, Boulez wrote over fifteen texts accompanying the recorded editions. So, for example, in 1963, the record of Berg’s complete works conducted by Boulez was accompanied by the text “Situation de interprétation de *Wozzek*”.

Boulez’s most active period in the creation of a discourse about music was from 1948 to 1980 and it happened through all the three aforesaid types of publications. The number of published texts ranged from one to eight per year. However, from the eighties, Boulez as a musical writer acted exclusively as the author of the texts for musical magazines. The publications in question are issues of various types, focussing on electronic and computer music (*InHarmoniques*, *Computermusic*, *Emc*, and *Scientific American*). Since then, Boulez has spoken through the written word, and often in cooperation with other authors, only with the aim of promoting IRCAM, an institution that he was leading. For example, the text “Contemporary Music and the Public” was written with Michelle Foucault in 1983 or “*IRCAM: Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique*” with other members of IRCAM, in 1987. In this period, Boulez’s productivity started declining. In the years 1981, 1982 and 1984, he did not publish a single text, while Boulez’s last appearance in the role of a musical writer was in 1992 – the text in question is “Zukunftsmusik: avenir de la musique” in the magazine *Circuit*.

However, Boulez was as active in promoting his opinions about contemporary music in the nineties as before. As his shaping of ideas through written discourse declined, the number of his appearances as a speaker before audiences increased. Numerous interviews with the author were published in daily magazines and periodicals or given in TV shows. Some of them were transcribed and printed in musical magazines or in monographs. Among them the two most important ones, especially due to the abundance of information they offered, were *Par volonté et par hasard* and *Boulez on Conducting*. In the latter publication,<sup>9</sup> the

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<sup>9</sup> The book was first published in 2002 in France, whereas the English edition dates from the following year: *Boulez on Conducting* (Conversation with Cécile Gilly), trans. by Richard Stokes, London, Faber and Feber Limited, 2003.

composer speaks in detail about his conducting career, whereas the former<sup>10</sup> represents the printed version of the conversation about Boulez's activities up until his return to France in 1974 and his assuming the position of Director of IRCAM.

Boulez's spoken discourse in interviews concisely sums up what he discussed in his writings. Even though his activity as a musical writer in the nineties started to dwindle, his thought in the written word was paradoxically, from the eighties on, even more present in musical life than when he was tirelessly publishing several works a year. This was accomplished primarily by republishing everything that Boulez had written until that moment in several anthologies of texts. The majority of articles which came into being in the period from the fifties to the eighties were published as part of the anthology called *Points de repère* in 1981. Some works, even though they had come into being much earlier, were first printed precisely in this edition.<sup>11</sup> The second edition of this anthology appeared only four years later, complemented by the two texts ("Question d'héritage" and "Le parallèle Schoenberg – Kandinsky"), only to have its English version published the same year under the name of *Orientations: collected writings*, expanded with another three works ("Stravinsky: *The Rite of Spring*", "Musique traditionnelle – un paradis perdu" and "Invention/Recherche").<sup>12</sup> With this, the total number of articles published in both of these anthologies reached the number of sixty-eight.

However, a few years before that, it could be said, at the high point of Boulez's career as a composer-conductor, in 1966, the anthology *Relevés d'apprenti* was published with twenty-six works created in the period from 1948 to 1962. Before the printing of that publication, Boulez had written some of his most important compositions, achieved an international conducting career, had presented the premiere of *Wozzek* in Paris in 1963, performed *Parsifal* in Bayreuth in 1966 and started performing with leading world orchestras, such as the *BBC Symphony Orchestra* (1966–1975), the *Cleveland Orchestra* (from 1967) and *New York Philharmonic* (1969–1977). An interesting fact is that the publications *Relevés d'apprenti* and *Par volonté et par hasard* were published

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<sup>10</sup> *Par volonté et par hasard, entretiens avec Célestin Deliège*, Paris, Seuil, 1975; *Conversation with Célestin Deliège*, trans. anon., London, Eulenburg, 1976.

<sup>11</sup> "Temps, Notation et code", "Form", "Conclusion partielle" and "Alternatives" from 1960, "...to cut me off before night" from 1962, "Messiaen: vision et revolution" from 1973, "Messiaen: le temps de l'utopie" and "La toute-puissance de l'exemple" from 1978, and "Géométrie courbe de l'utopie" from the following year.

<sup>12</sup> *Points de repère*, Paris, Christian Bourgois éditeur, 1981, second edition 1985; *Orientations: collected writings*, edited by Jean-Jacques Nattiez and trans. by Martin Cooper, London, Faber and Faber, 1985.

by the publishing house Édition du Seuil, as part of the *Tel Quel* edition, whose editor was Philippe Sollers. On the publication list of this collection, aside from Boulez's name were the names and works of Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Gérard Genette, Julia Kristeva, Marcellin Pleynet, Denis and Maurice Roche, Jean-Louis Scheffer, Sollers, and Cvetan Todorov. The first critiques of structuralism at the beginning of the sixties in France appeared in the magazine of the same name, in which in 1963 one of Boulez's texts "Le goût et la fonction" was published. The publishing not only of this text but also the whole anthology of writings in the *Tel Quel* edition was indicative of the orientation of Boulez's theoretical thought. The collection *Relevés d'apprenti* was first published in English two years after the original, and then for the second time in 1991.<sup>13</sup> With this, at the beginning of the nineties, the composer's written discourse was re-actualized with the publication of the third edition of the collection *Points de repère* and Boulez's correspondence with Cage, both in French and in English.<sup>14</sup>

While *Points de repère* and *Relevés d'apprenti* contain texts concerning different motifs and content areas, the publications *Musikdenken heute I* and *II* and *Jalons (pour une décennie)* re-present the presentation of Boulez's lectures in written form. The collection *Jalons* from 1989<sup>15</sup> was the printed version of texts which could be heard at the Collège de France during the eighties. Just like with the publishing of *Points de repère* and *Orientations*, the editor of collection *Jalons* was Jean-Jacques Nattiez and the publisher was Christian Burgois. Published in *Musikdenken heute I* from 1963, were the works that Boulez had presented during the International Summer Courses for New Music in Darmstadt in 1954, 1955 and 1956. The texts in German were published in 1963 and a French translation the following year, whereas the English edition appeared

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<sup>13</sup> *Relevés d'apprenti*, textes réunis et présent par Paule Théventin, Paris, Edition du Seuil, 1966; *Notes of an Apprenticeship*, trans. by Herbert Weinstock, New York, A. A. Knopf, 1968; *Stocktakings from an Apprenticeship*, trans. by Stephen Walsh, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1991.

<sup>14</sup> *Pierre Boulez / John Cage: Correspondance et documentes*, ed. J. J. Nattiez, Winterthur, Amadeus Verlag, 1990; *The Boulez – Cage Correspondance et documents*, op. cit.; *Pierre Boulez and John Cage: Correspondance et documents*, nouvelle éd., ed. Jean-Jacques Nattiez and Robert Pienickowski, Mainz, Schott, 2002. Boulez corresponded with Stravinsky from 1957 to 1967. This correspondence was not published and it mostly consists of short letters concerning mutual invitations for conducting appearances and notifications about publishing sheet music, whereas the speech on the poetics like in the case of correspondence between Boulez and Cage is not present. Cf. Robert Craft, "Stravinsky: Letters to Pierre Boulez", *The Musical Times*, June 1982, Vol. 123, No. 1672, 397.

<sup>15</sup> *Jalons (pour une décennie)*, ed. Jean-jacques Nattiez, Paris, Christian Burgois éditeur, 1989.



in 1971.<sup>16</sup> The great importance of these “lectures” in the Darmstadt circle is implied by the fact that this collection was published by the publishing house Schott (Mainz) which issued the magazine called *Darmstädter Beiträge zur neuen Musik*. This magazine published two of Boulez’s texts in 1960 and 1962 (“Zu meiner III. Sonate” and “L’accident”). The lectures in the period from 1960 to 1965, when Boulez was a guest lecturer four times in Darmstadt, were published by Schott in the collection *Musikdenken heute II*.<sup>17</sup> In its contemporary collections *Points de repère*, i.e. *Orientations*, versions in French and English were printed at the same time.

In the period from 1948, the writings of Pierre Boulez were published in several languages and in over forty magazines of art and contemporary music. They were also published in the programmes for concerts *Domaine musical*, for the performances of Wagner’s pieces in Bayreuth, in over sixteen booklets for the editions of the records on ‘new music’, in the forewords for different studies, in five collections printed in several volumes-which comes to over a hundred and thirty texts. The number of publications of Boulez articles is, however, almost four times as many as the number of titles, since a lot of texts were published several times and translated into other languages in different magazines or collections. The sheer size of theoretical work and its diverse trajectories point to the importance of Boulez work as a music writer, not only for understanding his work as a composer and a conductor, but also for the whole theoretical climate in the post-war modernist world of art he experienced. In Boulez’s works several points which Georgina Born designated as basic tendencies of post-war modernism can be noticed:<sup>18</sup> 1) the modernist autonomy of artistic discipline with theoretical references to the development of other artistic disciplines, primarily poetry; 2) the rejection of the previous artistic tradition accompanied by the tendency towards continuously advancing the language of art; 3) the centralist relation to “other” musical statics and “foreign” culture (popular culture and non-western cultures); 4) the research of the specific artistic medium and utilizing scientific and technological achievements for artistic purposes; 5) the critique of the policy of current academised artistic institutions.

With his works which cover more than a thousand pages, Boulez built for himself and his audience a complete discursive intellectual framework for action

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<sup>16</sup> *Musikdenken heute I*, Mainz, Schott, 1963; *Penser la musique aujourd’hui: Le nouvel espace sonore*, Paris, Gontier, 1964; *Boulez on Music Today*, trans. by S. Bradshaw and R. R. Bennet, London, Faber and Faber, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1971.

<sup>17</sup> *Musikdenken heute II*, trans. Josef Häusler, Mainz, Schott, 1985.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Georgina Born, *IRCAM, Boulez and the Institutionalization of the Musical Avant-Garde*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1995, 40–65.

in conducting and composing. According to the “main” problem of modernist art, which is the problem of understanding it, the theoretical action of the composer, in Boulez’s case, implied a written discourse in the service of musical discourse. The language of the work gains adequate meaning only in the case of its comprehension in the way of meta-speech about the primary language of musical compositions. The primary discourse in the hierarchy of Boulez’s actions was the field of creating music. The action of Boulez as a conductor and a musical writer proceeded with the aim of formulating a discursive space inside which newly created works would be accepted and understood. Boulez’s auto-poetic discourse as a secondary meta-language in relation to the composing practice had the meaning of the speech with which the artist tried to explain the reason, method and goal of his action, and at the same time, in a Foucault manner, it reached the meaning through which the creator established and conducted the power of his world of art.

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