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PROSPECTS AND PROBLEMS

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LITERATURE AND GEOGRAPHY: IMPLICATIONS FOR GEOGRAPHICAL RESEARCH

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From time to time geographers have asked the question, What is the relationship between literature and geography? *Relationship* is a vague word, and answers to the question have not been satisfactory. Answers tend to be of three kinds: geographical writing should have greater literary quality, literature is a source material for geographers, and literature provides a perspective for how people experience their world. Throughout there is the tacit assumption that we know the purpose of literature and the modes of expression appropriate to it.

Literature

Literature in the broad sense is written material: it includes everything from handbills and newspapers to collected poems and the contents of scientific journals. In geography, it includes the topographical poem and the regional novel as well as the works of academic geographers. When we require of the graduate student that he know the "geographical literature," we are thinking of those works that, for reasons that the sociology of knowledge seeks to understand, have come to be canonical in the discipline. There is "literature," and there is "professional literature." Both are geographical in the sense of embracing themes such as space, place, nature, and environment. What is the relationship between them?

The relationship between art and science is much clearer in the sister discipline of sociology. Robert Nisbet has clarified the degree to which sociology draws from the same creative impulses—rooted in history—as the modes of representation found in the arts. Quite often art anticipated science. Consider the city. In the West in the nineteenth century, the city came into its own as a social and cultural landscape.

French impressionists favored it: they painted innumerable pictures of public squares, cafes, street corners, city parks, and congested streets. Novelists of the time—notably, Balzac, Dostoevsky, Dickens, Zola, and Stendhal—frequently chose the city as a setting. Later came the sociological works of Tönnies, Weber, and Durkheim. Balzac's *La Comédie Humaine* depicted Paris in dense detail; he populated the metropolis with colorful individuals but also with social types—the same ones that can be found in the sociological treatises of the period. Marx appreciated Balzac's work for its first-rate social documentation and as excellent reading. With regard to the industrial landscape, Nisbet wrote: "Nowhere [are] the underlying historical unity of sociology and the artistic consciousness of the nineteenth century more vividly displayed . . . than in the renderings of the industrial landscape which issue from literature, painting, and sociology alike in that age."[1]

In contrast to sociology, academic geography evolved apart from artistic impulses and movements. Our roots in the humanities are shallow. Following Kant, geographers study natural processes and the "external" aspect of human phenomena. By "external" aspect Kant meant the human world of houses, fields, and customs and the population characteristics that are accountable by physical and biological laws.[2] Excluded from geography are the "internal" aspects that make people quintessentially human; namely, intention and will, ideas and symbols. In comparison with anthropology and sociology, geography has been less influenced by the *philosophes* of the Enlightenment and more by government and commerce: institutions that have at best only a marginal—that is, decorative—interest in literature. Not surprisingly, geography's concern with the arts has been largely decorative. We feel that exposure to the arts will make us more sensitive, that reading literary works will improve our writing style, and that just as pictures (not all strictly necessary) add to the esthetic appeal of our product, so will a few choice quotations from D. H. Lawrence. I am not against decorations, though they incur obvious risks. Thus a plodding but honest style becomes purplish rather than sensitive; that is, "precise," as when we speak of a sensitive scientific instrument; and literary excerpts impede the flow of thought or hide its absence.

Pictures

There are many kinds of literature and they differ greatly in character. What do they have in common? This question needs to be explored

before we can see how the more purely literary works might enrich the geographer's enterprise. Literature may be said to pinpoint or frame experience, which is made up of innumerable perceptions, acts, and environmental impingements. Experiences are concrete, yet in retrospect they are curiously elusive. At the end of a day or a lifetime, one may well ask, Where has it all gone? The purpose of literature is to present concrete experience (including the kind we have every day) and, in so doing, give us *an* experience of the concrete, which is a very different matter. To discover what our experience has been really like, we must reconstitute it. A major function of speech is to reconstitute experience: we do this each time we tell a neighbor what has happened on a shopping trip. Literature, because it appears in written form, is simply a more formal way of articulating this universal human need.

Both art and science abstract from the total inchoate flow of experience. They segment reality and make pictures of the world. These more-or-less abstract pictures, paradoxically, enable us to grasp the concreteness of experience. Ordinary speech—the kind of talk we engage in with friends over a cup of coffee—is strung with pictures of the world. They are, however, so conventional and incoherent that they fade from memory almost as fast as the concrete experiences themselves. Artistic and scientific pictures of the world differ from those of ordinary speech in their far greater coherence and originality. A common response to a work of art is, "That's what life is really like"; and a common response to a work of science is, "That's how nature really works." These pictures tend to endure in our memory. By stabilizing experience they make reality feel more stable.

How do artistic and scientific pictures of the world differ from each other? A short answer might be, The one strives for completeness, the other strives for clarity. Einstein puts the perspective of the scientist as follows:

> The theoretical physicists' picture of the world is one among all the possible pictures. It demands vigorous precision in all the description of relationships. Therefore the physicist must content himself from the point of view of subject matter with "portraying the simplest occurrences which can be made accessible to our experience"; all more complex occurrences cannot be reconstructed without the necessary degree of subtle accuracy and logical perfection. "Supreme purity, clarity, and certainty, at the cost of completeness."[3]

Road and Garden

An artist like Tolstoy seeks completeness; a physical scientist like Einstein seeks clarity and analytical precision. The difference in aspiration can be put in another way. Dorothy Walsh writes: "A linguistic composition is, or aspires to be, artistic insofar as it is nonteleological and moves towards closure, whereas it is nonartistic insofar as it is teleological and moves towards conclusion." The nonartistic ideal is telelogical because it is the ideal of progressive development to an end. "This end constitutes the element of prime importance for the sake of which everything else exists, and the structural pattern may be roughly symbolized by a line along which one moves. The artistic ideal is different. It is more properly symbolized by a circle than by a line, for the purpose is not to reach a conclusion but to achieve a total presentation." Walsh then varies her metaphor by saying that a general difference between nonliterary and literary types of work is comparable "to the difference between travelling along a road to a destination, on the one hand, and, on the other, exploring, though according to a controlled order or sequence, an enclosed garden."4

If one strives for clarity and conclusion, then the ideals of completeness and closure must be sacrificed. But the reverse is not necessarily true. A road, after all, can be built within the garden. A road that winds among the rocks and water of the garden may nonetheless contain a straight stretch that is teleological in character. In other words, a literary composition can contain scientific analysis without damaging the ideal of closure. Melville can introduce technical matters on whaling in *Moby Dick*; and Mann, discourse on natural history and evolution in the *Confessions of Felix Krull*. Even a short story is able to accommodate scientific exposition in small measure; for instance, in the short story *Young Archimedes*, Huxley shows how the Pythagorean theorem is solved by a precocious child.

Style

C. S. Lewis makes the following wise remarks on style:

> The way for a person to develop a style is (a) to know exactly what he wants to say, and (b) to be sure he is saying exactly that. The reader, we must remember, does not start by knowing what we mean. If our words are ambiguous, our

> meaning will escape him. I sometimes think that writing is
> like driving sheep down a road. If there is any gate open
> to the left or right the readers will most certainly go into
> it.[5]

What exactly do we want to say? "Exactly" is perhaps a counsel of perfection, but it is obvious we must be fairly clear as to what we want to say before we can try to say just that. When a geographer asks a student to read literary works in order to improve his style for geographical writing, he surely speaks loosely and out of ignorance. To develop a better style for reporting on climatological research, the student should study the best scientific papers rather than, say, the works of Charles Dickens.

An important stylistic difference between literary and nonliterary compositions lies in their degree of explicitness. A literary work implies, even when it appears to be simply stating; whereas a scientific work—with its narrowly defined goal—should only attempt to state. In an achieved piece of literary work the implications are intended; in scientific writing they appear unsought and they cannot be wholly avoided so long as one uses ordinary language.

Metaphor and simile differ in degree of explicitness, and the relative frequency of their use in texts should be a measure of the texts' literary or scientific aspiration. A dictionary definition of *metaphor* is: "The application of a word or phrase to an object or concept which it does not literally denote, in order to suggest comparison with another object or concept, such as 'a mighty fortress is our God,' 'alluvial apron,' and 'motherland'." *Simile*, by contrast, is a figure of speech in which two unlike things are explicitly compared; e.g., "the brain is like a computer." Both metaphor and simile exemplify creative thought, which is the power to see semblances and connections among dissimilar phenomena. Whereas metaphors belong to a literary work they should be excised in favor of the explicit simile in scientific composition. The reason is that a literary work is complex and does not aim to conclude: the hinted relationships of one metaphor are balanced by those of another. A scientific work does aim at conclusion, which may be wrong if the ruling metaphor is not explicitly recognized. A scientist, for example, may start with the idea that society is somewhat like an organism. In the text, however, he may analyze society as though it were an organism and conclude that it *is* an organism.

"It is always more difficult to write, say, four sentences in one, as in literature, than one in one, as in philosophy."[6] Thus Jean-Paul Sartre explains why it is more laborious for him to do literature than to do philosophy. He compares a sentence from Descartes with a sentence

from Stendhal. "I think, therefore I am" can have infinite repercussions in philosophical discourse, but as a sentence it possesses the meaning that Descartes gave it. In contrast, when Stendhal writes, "As long as he could see the clock tower of Verrières, Julien kept turning around," the sentence, by simply saying what the character does, also tells us what Julien feels, what Mme de Renal feels, the significance of the clock tower, and so on. Stendhal was an author who could, by merely stating facts, both suggest underlying social relationships and evoke a world of feelings.[7]

Rules for solving mathematical equations can be taught, but none exists for the invention of a mathematical idea. Clear expository prose can be taught, but no one can tell another how to create a single new metaphor. In scientific and philosophical writing clarity is the chief virtue: a good style is one that leads the reader undeviatingly from premise to conclusion. In literary works, the depiction of complex and tenuous relationships as they exist simultaneously calls for a language that is subtle and richly suggestive: the writer must be able to write "four sentences in one," and he will be dependent on images that synthesize dissimilar ideas—in other words, metaphors.

Literature and Facts

A historical geographer might wish to examine literary compositions for facts. What was Ch'ang-an like in the T'ang dynasty? The poet Po Chü-I, long resident of the imperial capital, wrote:

> Hundreds of houses, thousands of houses—like a great chess-board.
> The twelve streets like a huge field planted with rows of cabbage.
> In the distance I see faint and small the torches of riders to court,
> Like a single row of stars lying to the west of the five gates.[8]

These lines give an essentially correct image of Ch'ang-an in the early part of the ninth century. The city had a simple geometric pattern and its broad streets, oriented north to south and east to west, partitioned the city so that it resembled "a great chess-board." Darkness and quiet reigned at night, and as dawn approached one could see "faint and small the torches of riders to court." If a short poem offers useful facts to the historical geographer, then a long prose work would prove a much richer mine. Few scholars of Victorian London fail to quote from the works of Charles Dickens, and this not merely for embellishment: the works provide an abundance of physical and social facts.

But were there twelve streets in T'ang Ch'ang-an or only eleven, as

other kinds of evidence suggest? Was the London of Dickens geographically accurate in all details? When Charlotte Brontë mentioned granite in her description of the moorland scenery in *Jane Eyre*, she was surely wrong because the Pennines had wide exposures of Millstone Grit but not of the igneous rock.[9] Accuracy in factual detail has never been the aim of literary art. What, then, is its aim?

Modes of Experience

Actual experience can be only lived. Any attempt to present it—from gossip and novels to the scientific treatise—is an abstraction. Actual experience is particular; of necessity we report it in generality. Literary art is more particular than general discourse, far less particular than the moment-by-moment sensations, thoughts, and impacts of living. An aim of literary art is to present possible modes of experience. What is it like to be a gas station attendant in the Chicago of the 1920s? We may know because of the accuracy and subtlety with which the novelist has drawn the intricate web of feelings, actions, and interactions of that particular world. Such accuracy is one of relationships in context rather than of isolated facts. The question is not whether State Street is two or three blocks from Michigan Avenue, but, Given this set of conditions, will persons behave thus?

The human reality presented by a talented novelist is much more complex than that of which a social scientist is normally aware. When a geographer or historian studies the Great Plains, he is likely to organize facts into traditional categories such as the physical environment, Indians, the Cattle Kingdom, the search for water, and so on. What other modes of experience might he consider? Turning to Rölvaag's *Giants of the Earth*, he becomes acutely aware that the story of the settlement of South Dakota was not only that of Per Hansa but also that of his wife Beret and their children. True, the data on women and children are not readily available. The scientist nevertheless needs to be reminded that his understanding of male behavior on the Great Plains is incomplete because his model has failed to take into account the presence or absence of women and children.

The social scientist can learn to ask questions and formulate hypotheses from literary works, which are often highly venturesome "thought experiments." In a novel, for example, a country house was accidentally burned down. Before the event, squire and villagers had one type of relationship. After the event, what changes in the relationship might reasonably occur? Suppose it were discovered later that the disaster was

not an accident but the work of an arsonist: How will that knowledge affect the community? A novelist is forced to think through in detail the effects of events and initiatives on the densely textured world he has created. A planner wants to know the impact of a new highway on the community it traverses. The type of mind required to envisage all the possible human consequences of such a change is that of a novelist. Technical formulations of specific causes and effects appear at a later stage. How many planners have the imagination of a novelist as well as the scientist's skill for explicit analysis of defined problems?

A major challenge to the social geographer is to know what to observe. Here works of literary art are often helpful. They focus the attention of the scientist on things he may miss, however long he stays in the field. Consider, for example, the important task of trying to understand the nature of neighborhood. Who are the neighbors? How do they relate to each other? Is talk essential to the social bond or can it be established by common activity with utilitarian gestures that also communicate at a personal level? In a poem entitled "Neighbors," David Evans describes a couple who live alone together, "she with a wide hind and bird face / he with his hung belly and crewcut. / They never talk but keep busy."

> Today they are
> washing windows
> (each window together)
> she on the inside
> he on the outside.
> He squirts Windex
>   at her face;
> She squirts Windex
>   at his face.
>
> Now they are waving
> to each other
> with rags,
> not smiling.[10]

Perceptions of Reality

Literary compositions provide the geographer with evidence of how persons in the past and in other cultures perceive reality. What we designate as "professional geographical literature" is a highly specialized type of environmental awareness. More widely shared among the

literate members of society are the perceptions of the imaginative writer. What role does the physical environment or nature play in the human world? A dominant one, to judge from Anglo-American writers in the nineteenth century. "We have almost forgotten," Mary McCarthy wrote, "that descriptions of sunsets, storms, rivers, lakes, mountains, valleys, used to be one of the staple ingredients of fiction, not merely a painted backdrop for the action but a component evidently held to be necessary to the art."[11] An author's skill was demonstrated by his descriptive prowess: much admired were Dickens' London fogs, Emily Brontë's moors, Hardy's heath and vales, Melville's Pacific. Geographers naturally tended to stress the physical environment and to assign it a pervasive influence on the human drama, but the same bias was discernible among literary artists of the nineteenth century. "In the old triad of plot, character, and setting, the setting, comprising Nature and her moods, supplied the atmosphere in an almost literal sense; it was the air the novel breathed, like the life-sustaining air surrounding Mother Earth."[12]

A work in regional geography usually begins with a lengthy description of the physical environment, a description that has little to do with the human scene that follows. In a similar way, the set descriptive pieces in fictional writing could often be skipped without affecting the sense of the plot; though not always, obviously, for nature is sometimes a principal actor, and in stories of the sea it is inevitably the prime antagonist. In many works of fiction, physical objects and settings are intimately woven with human moods and behavior, as they are in real life. When we study the writings of Joyce and Faulkner we should attend to these intimate pacts between persons and setting rather than isolate the setting with the purpose of seeing whether a particular street or river is accurately located.

Geography as Art

Sociology and art, we have noted, often drew on the same source of inspiration. French novelists like Stendhal, Flaubert, and Balzac aspired to portray social reality. They pretended to tell what society was really like. Stendhal's *The Red and the Black* was subtitled *Chronicle of the Year 1830,* and Flaubert's masterpiece bore the subtitle *Moeurs de Province,* as though it were a sociological treatise. Not only individual characters but social types filled the vast canvas of Balzac's *La Comédie Humaine.*

To understand natural phenomena external description suffices. This is not true for human phenomena. Alfred Schutz explains why:

The world of nature, as explored by the natural scientist, does not "mean" anything to molecules, atoms, and electrons. But the observational field of the social scientist —social reality—has a specific meaning and relevance for the human beings living, acting, and thinking within it. . . . The thought objects constructed by the social scientist, in order to grasp this social reality, have to be founded upon the thought objects constructed by the commonsense thinking of men, living their daily life within their social world. Thus, the constructs of the social sciences are, so to speak, constructs of the second degree, that is, constructs of the constructs made by the actors on the social scene, whose behavior the social scientist has to observe and to explain in accordance with the procedural rules of his science.[13]

What kinds of reality do ordinary men and women construct as they go about their business? Novelists and short story writers are at home with these subjective realities. Social scientists have to take them into account and did so in the early, imaginative phase of the discipline's history. In trying to depict reality the novelist encountered a fundamental problem that was and is also that of the social scientist; namely, how to combine the subjective with the objective.

The Subjective-Objective Problem

Geographers know how to describe and manipulate objective space and time, and so do fiction writers. In the nineteenth century for the first time fiction writers became acutely aware of the need to balance the subjective and objective realities. As Robert Langbaum put it, "Novelists established their reality through exact notations of historical and quotidian time. But Victorian novelists are increasingly preoccupied with the problematical nature of time, with the disparity between psychic and clock or calendar time."[14] For the same reason they show increasing concern for the problem of synthesizing "points of view" with objective reality. "The Victorian novelists are unwilling to *settle* for the point-of-view novel. Yet points of view are what they introduce through their multiple perspectives even while they try to maintain objective reality as a separate interest."[15]

What is objective reality? It is God's view of the world and, in the case of the novel, that of the omniscient narrator. If the omniscient narrator is too visible in the novel the characters will seem like puppets with no freedom and will of their own. Such a work resembles a socio-

logical treatise or a geographer's well-intentioned attempt to portray a region. On the other hand, if multiple perspectives prevail *the* world disappears in the proliferation of separate worlds. The scale at which reality can be presented diminishes. A novelist or social scientist, for example, may want to describe Minneapolis; but the city as an entity dissolves if he or she spends too much time on communities and communal viewpoints. Likewise, the community dissolves if individual points of view are overemphasized.

In the twentieth century, fiction writers, like social scientists, gave up the attempt to balance the subjective and the objective and sought instead to follow either one approach or the other. In the subjective approach, objects and objective reality become mere symbols of psychic states; examples appear in the expressionist novels of Kafka and Beckett. In the objective approach, not only the psychic states and viewpoints of the characters in a fictional work disappear, but the narrative structure itself disintegrates because the structure reminds one of the existence of the narrator, a manipulator. In the works of Robbe-Grillet the narrative is so externalized, so absorbed into the surface of things that metaphors are eschewed in geographical description, since they seek to join objects to inner states. William Barrett so interprets this stand:

> We cannot say, "The village slept in the curve of the valley," for that is already an attempt to assimilate an external physical fact into our human world of waking and sleeping. The village happens only to be located in the valley. That is the bald physical fact, to which we are to hold if we are to evade illusion.[16]

Synthesis

It is ironic to note that some of the shoddier specimens of geographical description bear a superficial resemblance to French novels of the "New Wave." In geography texts, we have all encountered the dry itemization of streets, shopping centers, and other land use patterns as though they somehow add up to a living portrait of the city. At the other extreme, the interest in viewpoints and perspectives may be carried so far that it dissolves the external world and makes it impossible to depict a unit larger than the fragmented worlds of the committed individual actors.

The model for the regional geographer of humanistic learning is neither Beckett nor Robbe-Grillet but the Victorian novelist who strives

to achieve a synthesis of the subjective and the objective. The geographer must consider both psychic time and calendar time, both "points of view" and objective reality. In portraying a region the ideal geographer introduces individuals with proper names as well as social types, thus following the example of Balzac. The geographer prepares the stage and adopts an overview, which may appear at the beginning of the book as in E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*. The first chapter of this classic, only two pages long, is a masterful description of the physical and social setting. The geographer discusses his philosophy of reality and his analysis and understanding of a situation, just as George Eliot did in *Adam Bede* and *Middlemarch* (put in the mouth of a reflective character) and as Tolstoy did in *War and Peace*. In other words, the Victorian novel and its twentieth-century progenies show how it is possible to combine in one work individuals and social types, the inchoate density of living and explicit analyses, points of view, and an objective reality that, in human terms, is simply the writer's best intelligence.

Literary art serves the geographer in three principal ways. As thought experiment on possible modes of human experience and relationship, it provides hints as to what a geographer might look for when he studies, for instance, social space. As artifact it reveals the environmental perceptions and values of a culture: it serves the geographer, who is also a historian of ideas. Finally, as an ambitious attempt to balance the subjective and the objective it is a model for geographical synthesis; for geography is a garden that contains the road, an art form capacious enough to include analysis.

Notes

1. Robert Nisbet, *Sociology as an Art Form* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 61.

2. J. A. May, *Kant's Concept of Geography and Its Relation to Modern Geographical Thought*, University of Toronto Department of Geography Research Publication no. 4 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), pp. 114–15.

3. Gerald Holton, *Thematic Origins of Scientific Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), p. 377.

4. Dorothy Walsh, *Literature and Knowledge* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1969), pp. 37–39.

5. C. S. Lewis, *Underception* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1971), p. 219.

6. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Life/Situations: Essays Written and Spoken* (New York: Pantheon, 1977), p. 8.

7. Ibid.

8. "Climbing the Terrace of Kuan-yin and Looking at the City," in *Translations from the Chinese*, trans. Arthur Waley (1919; New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1941), p. 257.

9. A. E. Trueman, *Geology and Scenery in England and Wales* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Pelican, 1949), p. 164.

10. From D. A. Evans, "Neighbors," copyright 1971 by Washington and Lee University,

reprinted from *Shenandoah:* The Washington and Lee University Review (summer 1971), with the permission of the Editor and the Author; also reprinted in Lucien Stryk, ed., *Heartland II* (De Kalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1976).

11. Mary McCarthy, "One Touch of Nature," in *The Writing on the Wall* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1970), p. 189.

12. Ibid.

13. Alfred Schutz, *Collected Papers,* vol. 1 (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1962), p. 59.

14. Robert Langbaum, "The Art of Victorian Literature," in Josef L. Altholz, ed., *The Mind and Art of Victorian England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1976), p. 30.

15. Ibid.

16. William Barrett, *Time of Need* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1973), p. 59.

CHAPTER 13

INTRODUCING
THE CARTOGRAPHY
OF REALITY

DENIS WOOD

The recent interest of behavioral geographers in cognitive maps and cognitive mapping has highlighted the disjuncture between the everyday perception of distance and space and the cartographic standard that serves to represent them.[1] While the map maker's metric itself may be arbitrary, its fixed scales often fail to coincide with the variability, contingency, and fluidity of cognitive assessments.[2] This paper introduces some preliminary propositions for the development of a cartography of reality based upon the anthropocentric notions of distance and space we all know in everyday experience.

A cartography, a geography, of reality cannot be based on unsuspected and unsupportable abstractions of the nth degree but must be rooted in palpable daily human experience. Unlike contemporary academic cartography, a cartography of reality must be humane, humanist, phenomenological, and phenomenalist: humane because it must be founded in an unflinching respect for people and the reports they make of their experience; humanist because it must concern itself with the conditions and qualities of being human rather than being a yardstick or camera; phenomenological because it must embrace the totality of human experience of space with considerations of objective reality and purely subjective response left temporarily out of account; and phenomenalist because it must be underwritten by the radical prepositivist empiricism of David Hume.[3] It must reject as inhumanly narrow both the data base and subject matter of contemporary academic cartography and repudiate the untenable distinction currently drawn in the behavioral geographies between the world within the head and the world without.

Three principles will enable the translation of these intentions into maps of the real world. The primary given is that individual experience is the only valid measure of the world. Implied by this is the second principle, that the real world is accessible only to each of us alone. True

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