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### Afterword

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**R**eaders of this important and agenda-setting issue of *Angelaki* are confronted by a number of key questions concerning the scientific and social status of the concepts of complexity, materialism, difference, and the process of subject formation. How has the historical context of advanced capitalism altered our understanding of embodiment, complexity, and interrelationality? How has materialism changed in response to the different understandings of “matter” induced by the current scientific advances? How do they affect specifically bodily or corporeal materialism? How do the new notions of “matter” affect critiques of biopower on the one hand and new forms of vital politics on the other? How does the practice of the political shift in response to these? And how is the political and theoretical project of sexual difference inscribed in this new context?

#### the perverse materiality of advanced capitalism

Advanced capitalism is a difference-engine that promotes the marketing of pluralistic differences and the commodification of the existence, culture, and genetic codes of multiple “others” for the purpose of consumerism. The global system of postindustrial and newly industrializing worlds produces scattered and poly-centered yet always profit-oriented power relations which function not so much by binary oppositions but in a fragmented and all-pervasive manner. The rhizomic or web-like structure of contemporary power, however, does not alter fundamentally its terms of application. If anything, power relations in globalization are more ruthless than ever. Advanced capitalism also engenders, therefore, a problematic form of mobility because the much-celebrated practice of “free circulation”

rosi braidotti

#### AFTERWORD

#### *complexity, materialism, difference*

pertains exclusively to the domain of goods and commodities, provided they guarantee maximum profit. People do not circulate nearly as freely.<sup>1</sup> This perverse variation on nomadism expresses a logic of economic exploitation that equates capitalist flows and flux with the circulation of commodities.<sup>2</sup> It also produces a notion of pan-humanity as united by shared threats and dangers in what has become a global risk society.<sup>3</sup> If global communication networks can engender a positive form of proximity, epidemics, environmental catastrophes, and militarization construct a negative form of planetary interconnection.

Considering the extent to which contemporary economies depend on the commodification of life itself, an instrumental form of posthumanism

## complexity, materialism, difference

emerges from the very post-anthropocentric opportunism of advanced capitalism. The biogenetic dimension of advanced capitalism is such that it is not only genocentric<sup>4</sup> but also ruthlessly and structurally unjust. Deleuze and Guattari analyzed this situation in terms of capitalism as a conflict between, on the one hand, the rising demands for subjective singularities and, on the other, the conservative reterritorialization of desires for the purpose of commercial profit.<sup>5</sup> This internally contradictory movement achieves the doubly disastrous effect of reasserting consumerist liberal individualism as the unquestionable standard for subject formation, while reattaching it to the multiplying and spinning power of contemporary technologically mediated global economies.

Technologies – more specifically information and biotechnologies – are intrinsic to the social and discursive structures of postindustrial societies. They are also central to the perverse shift in the political economy of difference: the proliferation of quantitative differences – multiples of One – on a planetary scale. Access to and participation in the new high-tech world are, however, unevenly distributed worldwide, with gender, age, and ethnicity acting as the major axes of negative differentiation.<sup>6</sup>

Two major notions get dislocated in this political economy of spinning differences: the first is our understanding of matter itself and the second the relation between the organic and the technological artifact.

Firstly, the question of technology raises its multifaceted head once again and forces us to question what exactly is going on between technology and the space that is already pre-designated as the interval between bodies. Heidegger both humanizes technology and makes it part of the human capacity for ecstatic ex-centricity (standing beside oneself in conscious self-reflexivity) which he sees as constitutive of the human subject.<sup>7</sup> Postmodernity is the historical time when such ontological distinctions collapse. Our historical context plunges us, therefore, in an extended post-Heideggerian limbo, caught between spectral echoes of posthuman humanisms and nostalgic longings for new universals.

We are caught in a perverse materiality, in that our era is marked by a new and perversely fruitful alliance with technology which stresses the proximity, familiarity, and increased intimacy between the human and the non-human technological universe. In the cyberuniverse that we inhabit a rather complex bond of mutual dependence has emerged between the flesh and the machine. This engenders some significant paradoxes, especially when it comes to the human body: the corporeal site of subjectivity is simultaneously denied, in a fantasy of escape, and strengthened or re-enforced. Bodily materialism is altered accordingly.

Deleuze's anti-essentialist vitalism and emphasis on complexity offer a rigorous call for rethinking human embodiment in a manner that is coextensive with our technological habitat. Deleuze and Guattari show that established ideas of the organic and the mechanical are equally molar, or sedentary. In opposition to the holistic, neo-Romantic, and anxious view of the mechanical world, they defend a molecular, machinic one, which is about becomings, without ultimate purpose or finality. A kind of generalized "becoming-bachelor-machine."<sup>8</sup>

This is an important cautionary note because, as Keith Ansell Pearson argues, some grand narratives have come back into fashion that tend to be deterministic and evolutionary in a naïve and oddly old-fashioned way: "A new mythology of the machine is emerging and finds expression in current claims that technology is simply the pursuit of life by means other than life."<sup>9</sup> This simplistic and reductive reading of the transformations currently at work in our global system reveals great conceptual poverty. A hierarchical fantasy of vertical perfectibility, a technologically mediated quest for immortality and for disciplined and acquiescent subjects, has gained widespread currency, which betrays the nomadic potential of contemporary science.<sup>10</sup> In opposition to this master narrative, which corresponds to what Donna Haraway calls "the informatics of domination,"<sup>11</sup> feminist and nomadic matter-realist philosophers stress the relevance of materialist, vital, and complex philosophies of becoming, as an alternative conceptual framework, in the service of a sustainable future.

## matter-realism and vital politics

Secondly, about the new understandings of “matter”: contemporary capitalism is “bio-political” in that it attempts to control all that lives: it has already turned into a form of generalized biopiracy aiming to exploit the generative powers of women, animals, plants, genes, and cells. This means that human and anthropomorphic others are relocated in a continuum together with non-anthropomorphic or “earth” others. The categorical distinction that separated the Human from his (the gender is no coincidence) naturalized others has shifted, taking the humanist assumptions about what constitutes the basic unit of reference for the “human” into a spin.

The contemporary social imaginary in relation to these changes swings between euphoric techno-transcendentalism and paranoid technophobia.<sup>12</sup> This manic-depressive associative nexus results in negative representations of different “others” – the techno-monsters of late, postindustrial popular culture. An essential element of their monstrosity is an element of hybridity – that is to say the blurring of categorical distinctions or constitutive boundaries. Primary blurrings occur between different sexes, races, and species – the human/the animal, the organic/the inorganic/technological.

The blurring of these categorical divides between self and others creates a sort of heteroglossia, a colossal hybridization that ends up locating “Life itself” as non-human agent at the center of scientific and political debate.<sup>13</sup> After so much emphasis on the linguistic and the cultural, an ontology of presence replaces textual or other deconstruction.

I refer to the neorealist practices of bodily materialism as “matter-realism,”<sup>14</sup> radical neo-materialism, or posthuman feminism. One of the main reasons to advocate these is the changing conceptual structure of materialism itself through the impact of contemporary biogenetics and information technologies. The Spinozist switch to a monistic political ontology stresses processes, vital politics, and non-deterministic theories of evolution – as argued brilliantly by Elizabeth Grosz in this and other volumes. Politically, the

## braidotti

emphasis falls accordingly on the micropolitics of relations, as a posthumanist ethics that traces transversal connections among material and symbolic, concrete and discursive, lines and forces. Transversality actualizes an ethics based on the primacy of the relation, of interdependence, which values non-human or a-personal Life. This is what I call *zoe*-posthuman politics.<sup>15</sup>

The most striking feature of the current scientific redefinition of “matter” is the wider acceptance granted to the shift of emphasis in thinking about difference from binaries to rhizomatics. Critical theory needs to look carefully at the dislocation of the dialectical relationships between the traditional axes of difference: sexualization/racialization/naturalization and attempts to come to terms with this challenge. It can also be described as a sort of “anthropological exodus” from the dominant configurations of the human<sup>16</sup> – a massive hybridization of the species which topples the Human from the sovereign position it has enjoyed for so long. This standard is posited in a universal mode as Man, but this pseudo-universal has been widely criticized precisely because of its partiality.<sup>17</sup> Universal Man, in fact, is implicitly assumed to be masculine, white, urbanized, speaking a standard language, heterosexually inscribed in a reproductive unit and a full citizen of a recognized polity.<sup>18</sup>

Brian Massumi refers to this phenomenon as “Ex-Man,” “a genetic matrix embedded in the materiality of the human” and as such undergoing significant mutations: “species integrity is lost in a bio-chemical mode expressing the mutability of human matter.”<sup>19</sup> Haraway sums up the current predicament as follows: “This is Man the taxonomic type become Man the brand.”<sup>20</sup> The perverse economy of our times challenges post-anthropocentrism. What emerges is the vital politics of posthuman life.

What matters for materialism today is consequently the concept of matter itself.<sup>21</sup> The switch to a monistic political ontology stresses processes, vital politics, and non-deterministic evolutionary theories.<sup>22</sup> French epistemology has a long and glorious history of “enchanted materialism,” that is to say a nonreductive understanding of the material roots of human consciousness and of scientific knowledge production. The respective

## complexity, materialism, difference

work of Foucault's teacher Georges Canguilhem and of Deleuze's teacher Gaston Bachelard alone bears testimony to the enormous influence of this epistemological tradition. The former argues that a sort of primitive anthropomorphism is implicit in the technological artifact and is written into the whole history of technology. The latter argues that embodiment functions, in this tradition of thought, as a crucial category which also enlists the forces of the imagination in the service of knowledge production.

This assertion of the primacy of the living organism over the technological implies that the technological other imitates the organic self. All technologies consequently become biotechnologies. The great advantage of this technophilic biophilosophy is that it paves the road for rethinking the symbiotic relationship between the human and the technological in productive and non-essentialist ways. This project will be implemented with brilliant originality by one of Canguilhem's American students – Donna Haraway – who introduced an affirmative and subversive form of technophilia into contemporary social and cultural theory and the notoriously technophobic feminist community. Technology is approached not only as the expression of the desire for mastery but also an object of desire, curiosity, and affective involvement.

The technobodies of late postindustrial societies can and should be understood in the light of the increasingly complex aggregation of information that contemporary science has been able to provide about them. With reference to molecular biology, genetics, and neurology – to mention just a few scientific fields – the body today can and should be described adequately as a sensor with serious credibility and an integrated site of information networks. It is a messenger carrying thousands of communication systems: cardiovascular, respiratory, visual, acoustic, tactile, olfactory, hormonal, psychic, emotional, erotic, etc., etc. Coordinated by an inimitable circuit of information transmission, the body is a living recording system, capable of storing and then retrieving the necessary information to process it at such speed that it can react "instinctively." Fundamentally prone to pleasure, the embodied subject tends towards the recollection and

repetition of experiences which pleasure has "fixed" psychically and sensually within the subject (to re-member, after all, is to re-peat and repetition tends to favor that which gave joy and not that which gave pain). The body is not only multifunctional but also in some ways multilingual: it speaks through temperature, motion, speed, emotions, excitement that affect the cardiac and other rhythms.

To account for the embodied self in keeping with contemporary understandings of matter and of complexity exemplifies the type of vitalistic materialism which the contributors to this special issue have illustrated brilliantly. The strategic position of sexual difference is inscribed at the heart of the perverse conflicts of interests of postindustrial technosciences. This special issue makes a significant contribution to the debate by striking a rigorous and coherent note of resistance against the neutralization of difference that is induced by the perverse materiality and the tendentious mobility of advanced capitalism. This system engenders a deliberate blurring of dichotomous differences, which, however, does not resolve or improve the mechanisms of power and in many ways exacerbates them. Taking a firm stand against these trends, this issue of *Angelaki* reiterates the notion that although – significantly enough – it is still up to the minorities to try to ground, i.e., to provide an accountable location for, alternative views of the subjects and hence also new images of thought, the issue of sexual difference in the formation of subjectivity is more timely than ever. Trust women, gays, and other alternative forces, with their historically leaky bodies,<sup>23</sup> to both reassert the powers and enhance the potentiality of the "wetware."<sup>24</sup> Let us trust a little more to contemporary evolutionary theories and biogenetics, however, to extend this pre-rogative to multiple non-human agents as well.

## sexual difference as the principle of not-one

The matter-realist turn has important implications for the discussion of sexuality and gender. Contrary to the social-constructivist methodology of gender and queer theory, contemporary sexual

difference theory proposes a vital politics of embodiment as becoming: sexuality beyond gender. Whereas queer theory in line with the linguistic turn locates the heterosexual discursive matrix at the core of its analyses of power,<sup>25</sup> in the vitalist tradition we return to the main insights about the polymorphous and perverse structure of human sexuality, to which we must add, however, the generative powers of female embodiment. In this perspective, gender is just one historically contingent mechanism of capturing the multiple potentialities of the body, including their generative or reproductive capacities. To turn it into *the* transhistorical matrix of power is quite simply a conceptual error and a political mystification. In a monist political economy, power is not a static given but a complex strategic flow of effects which call for a pragmatic politics of intervention and the quest for sustainable alternatives.<sup>26</sup>

Thus, Irigaray stresses the potency of female bodies as sites of the material, maternal power of engendering the future. She also emphasizes the symbolic and material costs of the "theft" of women's sexuality through the sacrificial ontology of a phallogocentric system that requires the exchange of women to fuel its socio-symbolic structures. The emphasis thus falls on the specificity of women's own sexual economy.<sup>27</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, on the other hand, broaden the scope of the discussion by stressing that the gender system captures the complexity of human sexuality in a binary machine that privileges heterosexual family formations and literally steals all other possible corporealities from us. As a result we no longer know what sexed bodies can do.

Both Irigaray and Deleuze challenge queer theory's reductive rendition of the original foreclosure of the first love object – the mother – and of the sexual complexity that marks the polymorphous and perverse structure of human sexuality. Both engage, in different but powerful ways, with the unconscious or transhistorical and transpersonal carnal elements that are involved in the process of capture or theft from the originary polymorphous sexual body. What is emerging more clearly in current discussions about sexuality is that, whereas most queer theory is solidly

## braidotti

ensconced in social-constructivist methods and political strategies, matter-realist thinkers affirm and explore the ontological aspects of sexuality and sexual difference, and not only its representational elements.

As a consequence, matter-realist or vitalist feminism, resting on a dynamic monistic political ontology, shifts the focus away from the sex/gender distinction, bringing sexuality as process into full focus. A first problem concerns the irrelevance of the category "same-sex" to account for the complex and multiple affects generated in the relation between two human beings. The redundancy of the sex/gender distinction for a feminist philosophy of the subject was noted in the late 1980s and early 1990s by English-speaking feminists working on Continental philosophy such as Judith Butler, Moira Gatens, Elizabeth Grosz, and me.

Contemporary feminist philosophers argue the same case in line with Deleuzian ontology. For instance, Claire Colebrook stresses that sexual difference is not a problem that needs a solution but a productive location to start from.<sup>28</sup> Patricia MacCormack draws attention to the need to return to sexuality as a polymorphous and complex force and to disengage it from both identity and all dualistic oppositions. She looks for subversion not in counter-identity formations but rather in pure dislocations of identities via perversion of standardized patterns of interaction.<sup>29</sup> The ethics of becoming is an ethology of the forces that propel the subject to overcome both forms and categories, deterritorializing all identities on its line of flight. This means by extension that sexuality is a force, or constitutive element, that is capable of deterritorializing gender – and the institutions that reproduce it.

Sexual difference, from being a boundary-marker, has become, therefore, a threshold for the elaboration and the expression of multiple differences, which extend beyond gender but also beyond the human. The emergence of the earth, and of "earth-others" as political subjects, is the surest indicator of this shift of perspective. I want to read this with the ecophilosophy of nomadism, as an attempt to rethink in a materialist manner the intricate web of interrelations that mark the contemporary relationship to one's environment.

## complexity, materialism, difference

Notions such as sexual difference as the principle that activates what I have defined as the "virtual feminine"<sup>30</sup> and Deleuze's theory of becoming-woman/-animal/-machine/-imperceptible provide new ontological grounds to recast a form of subjectivity which no longer assumes the unitary, self-evident subject of modernity or the essentialized subject of "standpoint" feminism. This is, rather, a non-unitary, multiple, complex subject.

One of the key assumptions of this special issue is therefore not so much that sexualized, racialized, and naturalized differences don't matter but rather that they no longer coincide with sexually, racially, and species-differentiated bodies. Advanced capitalism has de-linked the empirical referents of otherness (woman/native/earth other) from the imaginary institutions of sexuality/race/nature which traditionally framed them. It follows that the classical others are no longer the boundary-markers of categorical distinctions, or the necessary point of reference for the organization of a symbolic division of labor between the sexes, the races, and the species. Today, they have been transformed in the spectral economy of dematerialization of difference.

Genetic engineering and biotechnologies have seen to it that a qualitative conceptual dislocation has taken place in contemporary "Life" sciences. They have located the markers for the organization and distribution of differences in micro-instances like the cells of living organisms and the genetic codes of entire species. We have come a long way from the gross system that used to mark difference on the basis of visually verifiable anatomical differences between the empirical sexes, the races, and the species. We have moved from the biopower that Foucault saw exemplified in comparative anatomy to a society based on the governance of molecular *bios-zoe*-power of today. From disciplinary to control societies. In postmodernity, under the impact of the technological revolution, the political economy of the Panopticon is no longer adequate and has been replaced by the molecular informatics of domination. Regimes of discipline have metamorphosed into modulations of power that land on the living matter that composes the individual.<sup>31</sup>

This is not necessarily to say, however, that the patriarchal power relations have improved, or that the structural function which anatomical difference was called on to perform is obsolete. The collapse of traditional systems of marking difference makes it all the more urgent to reassert sexual difference as the privileged principle of alterity, of not-One as constitutive of the subject, and to elaborate nomadic forms of ethical accountability to match it. What is needed is an ethics of embodied differences that can sustain this challenge: an undifferentiated grammar of becoming simply will not do.

Difference, understood as the principle of not-One, fulfills the function of marking a fundamental break as the site of "origin" of the subject. What needs to be broken is the phantasy of unity, totality, and oneness. What is knocked out from the subject's psychic landscape is the delusion of stability, the phantasy of omnipotence. To recognize this basic, ego-deflating principle is ground zero of subject formation. The recognition of alterity in the sense of incommensurable loss and an unpayable outstanding debt to others entails the awareness that one is the effect of irrepressible flows of encounters, interactions, affectivity, and desire, which one is not in charge of. Bodily matter is always already sexed and hence sexually differentiated along multiple and heterogeneous axes.

This humbling experience of not-Oneness constitutive of the non-unitary subject, far from opening the doors to relativism, anchors the subject in an ethical bond to alterity, to the multiple and external others that are constitutive of that entity which, out of laziness and habit, we call the "self." The split or non-unitary nature of the subject entails the recognition of a prediscursive structure of the "self," of a necessary loss of that which is always already there – an affective, interactive entity endowed with intelligent flesh and an embodied mind. Whereas Lacanian psychoanalytic theory ontologizes this loss, and Derrida, with some help from Levinas, institutionalizes it as the constitutive interdependence of self and other, nomadic vital political theory builds on the productive aspects of the condition of not-One, that is to say a generative notion of complexity.

We have to learn to endure the principle of not-One at the level of the deep structures of our subjectivity. Becoming nomadic occurs by constructing communities where the notions of transience and passing are acknowledged in a sober, secular manner that binds us to the multiple "others" in a vital web of complex interrelations. Kinships systems and social bonding, like flexible citizenship, can be rethought differently and differentially, moving away from the fetishes of blood, earth, and origin implicit in the classical social contract. Given the extent of the transpositions brought about by advanced capitalism and the dislocations of traditional values and social bonding they have triggered, the conditions for a renegotiation of our being in *this* together are timely.

A materialist politics of difference-as-becoming today is a posthumanist, vitalist, non-unitarian, and yet accountable re-composition of a *missing people*. A community not bound together by the guilt of shared violence or by unpayable ontological debts, but rather by the compassionate acknowledgment of our shared need to negotiate processes of sustainable transformations with multiple others within the flow of monstrous energy of a "Life" that does not respond to our names, but endures through differences and by differing.



#### notes

Parts of this paper have been published in Rosi Braidotti, *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics* (Cambridge: Polity, 2006).

1 Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude* (New York: Semiotext(e), 2004); Maurizio Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor" in *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, eds. Michael Hardt and Paolo Virno (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1996).

2 Vandana Shiva, *Biopiracy: The Plunder of Nature and Knowledge* (Boston: South End, 1997).

3 Ulrich Beck, *World Risk Society* (Cambridge: Polity, 1999).

4 Anna Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality* (New York: Basic, 2000) 235.

#### braidotti

5 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1987).

6 Zillah Eisenstein, *Global Obscenities: Patriarchy, Capitalism and the Lure of Cyberfantasy* (New York: New York UP, 1998).

7 Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology" in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Krell (New York: HarperCollins, 1993).

8 This term was coined by the avant-garde movement of the surrealists to refer to artworks and other forms of non-functional object production. The bachelor machine is sterile and pleasure-prone, not productive and re-productive.

9 Keith Ansell Pearson, *Vivoid Life: Perspectives on Nietzsche and the Transhuman Condition* (New York: Routledge, 1997) 202.

10 Isabelle Stengers, *Power and Invention: Situating Science* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1997).

11 Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991) 61ff.

12 Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002).

13 Nikolas Rose, "The Politics of Life Itself," *Theory, Culture and Society* 18.6 (2001): 1–30.

14 Mariam Fraser, Sarah Kember, and Celia Lury, eds, *Inventive Life: Approaches to the New Vitalism* (London: Sage, 2006).

15 Rosi Braidotti, *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics* (Cambridge: Polity, 2006).

16 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2000) 215.

17 For example, Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: Male and Female in Western Philosophy* (London: Methuen, 1985).

18 See Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*.

19 Brian Massumi, "Requiem for our Prospective Dead (Toward a Participatory Critique of Capitalist Power)" in *Deleuze and Guattari: New Mappings in Politics, Philosophy and Culture*, eds. Eleanor Kaufman and Kevin Jon Heller (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1998) 60.



complexity, materialism, difference

20 Donna Haraway, *Modest\_Witness@Second\_Millennium. FemaleMan<sup>©</sup>\_MeetsOncoMouse<sup>TM</sup>: Feminism and Technoscience* (London: Routledge, 1997) 74.

21 Manuel DeLanda, *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy* (London: Continuum, 2002).

22 Elizabeth Grosz, *The Nick of Time: Politics, Evolution, and the Untimely* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1994).

23 Idem, *Space, Time, and Perversion: Essays on Bodies* (New York: Routledge).

24 This term is widely circulating in cyberspace to refer to the physical body, which is wet in relation to the dryness of electronic circuitry.

25 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

26 More in Braidotti, *Transpositions*.

27 Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1985); *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Minuit, 1977).

28 Claire Colebrook, "Is Sexual Difference a Problem?" in *Deleuze and Feminist Theory*, eds. Ian Buchanan and Claire Colebrook (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2000).

29 Patricia MacCormack, *Cinesexuality* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008).

30 Braidotti, *Metamorphoses*.

31 Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," *October* 59 (winter 1992): 3–7.

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