

The Garden observes (self-published, 2017)

By Doctor Loucas van den Berg

When I first read Odysseas Elytis' poetry, visions came to mind and I started to paint. These drawings and paintings started to tell a story of their own, entering into dialogue with the poet. Amir Fahimnia made video footage of this process, highlighting it all with sound images. As Elytis' poetry had developed partly through his experiences on the battlefields of WWII, it made me think back of Guillaume Apollinaire and his letters to Madeleine. He wrote these in the trenches of Verdun in 1915 and 1916. They held the same yearning for freedom, truthful images and original lines. I supplemented his letters of yesteryear with drawings. And I found them to fit Elytis' imagery in a wondrous manner. Thus, weaving could commence.

Loucas van den Berg

In the eyes of Odysseas Elytis (1911-1996), Greek Nobel laureate for Literature in 1979, there is something horribly amiss in this world. 'We are left behind as transmitters, abandoned in the desert and rendered useless for centuries past, desperately struggling the waves on the lookout for a receiver. Bundles of sounds, electronic music where the buckle has come undone. They seem to merge with co-falling stars deep into the night.' Unphased, Elytis manages to stake his claim. He writes: 'Somewhere perfected lies the Completeness and has us listen to a gurgling brook all the way to the here and now.' His poetry aims to take a profound look at the world and all things true.

Fighting a similar battle is the French poet Guillaume Apollinaire (1880 -1914). He enters WWI as a volunteer, fighting in the Verdun trenches. Apollinaire writes to his beloved Madeleine Pages, a twenty-two year old girl he has met on the train from Nice to Marseille on January 1st, 1915. 'My darling, I have been underground now for 9 days with no food or water. Are you real or is the pale moon real.... are you real or is the quaint house in the garden on our way here, real? Pray, write me words, plentiful words. Sing me a song in this landscape of rage.'

What touches me is the courage of these men, sensitive poets and men of the world who expressed themselves against the terror and pain of their surroundings. They extended themselves, remaining able to love and be amazed, oblivious of mental darkness. They dared to pose questions and transform their world by way of words and images, singing a song in a landscape of anger. The performance is interspersed with four short videos by Amir Fahimnia. The leitmotiv of the production is Odysseas Elytis' poem 'The garden observes'. For it is the garden that sees that which we fail to observe any longer.

Odysseas Elytis, The Garden Observes

Maybe
if we except Anchorites
I might be the last player
to exercise his rights

presumption
I don't understand
what profit means

a Panselinos who paints
though God does not exist
and proves
exactly the opposite

stream

what water
blue with sparks

beyond the barrier of the Sirens' sound
signals to me
leaping

come on

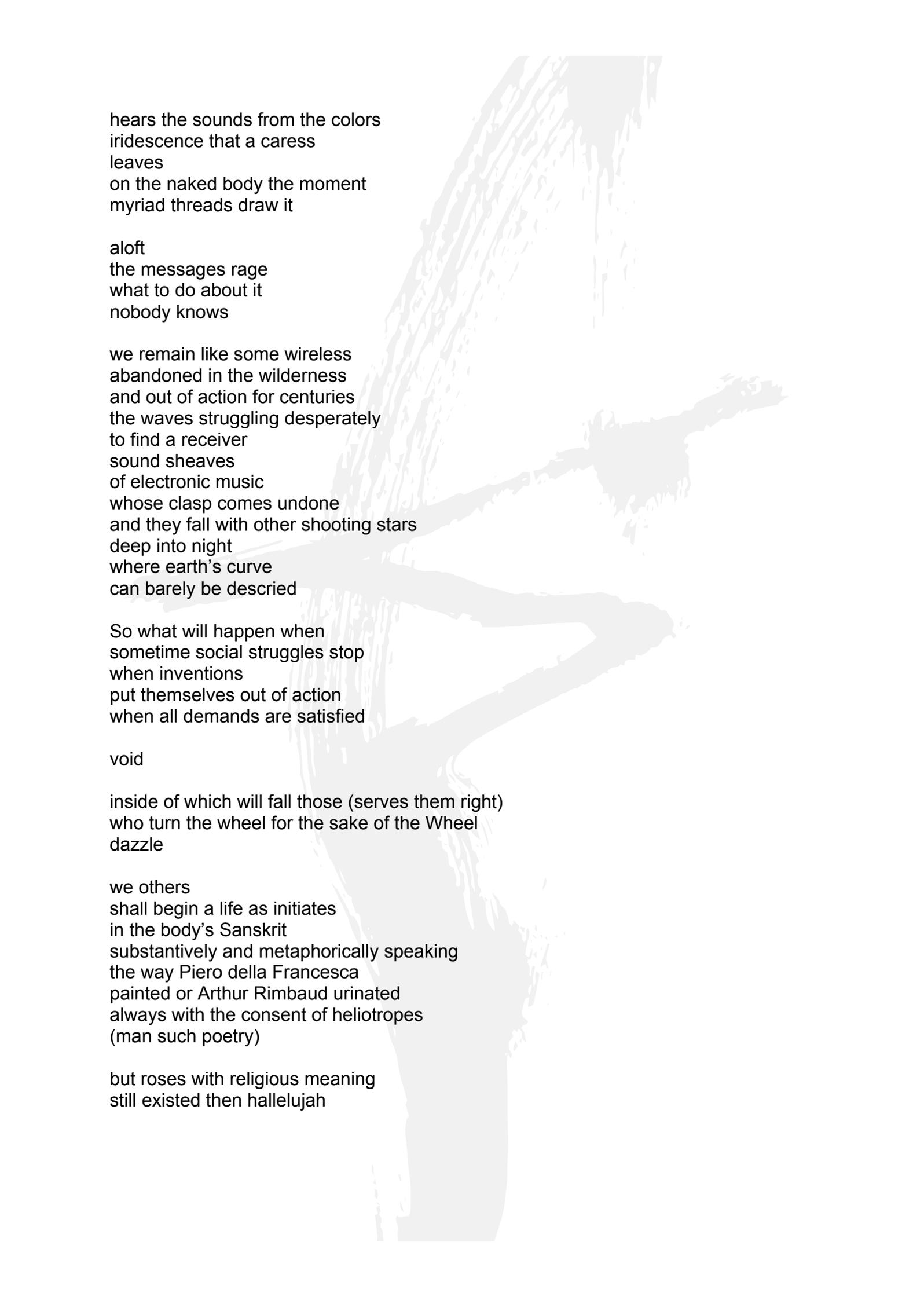
somewhere perfection lies completed
and lets a rivulet
roll up to here

Vivaldi Mozart
earrings all gleaming
the moment that the head's turning
reflects them

reality
doesn't care
who has good use of the perishable part
and who of the other

tipped-down arrows
and tipped-up arrows
have never met

the garden observes



hears the sounds from the colors
iridescence that a caress
leaves
on the naked body the moment
myriad threads draw it

aloft
the messages rage
what to do about it
nobody knows

we remain like some wireless
abandoned in the wilderness
and out of action for centuries
the waves struggling desperately
to find a receiver
sound sheaves
of electronic music
whose clasp comes undone
and they fall with other shooting stars
deep into night
where earth's curve
can barely be described

So what will happen when
sometime social struggles stop
when inventions
put themselves out of action
when all demands are satisfied

void

inside of which will fall those (serves them right)
who turn the wheel for the sake of the Wheel
dazzle

we others
shall begin a life as initiates
in the body's Sanskrit
substantively and metaphorically speaking
the way Piero della Francesca
painted or Arthur Rimbaud urinated
always with the consent of heliotropes
(man such poetry)

but roses with religious meaning
still existed then hallelujah

the Lady of Angels
with golden parachute
descended to your pillow
my Son she would lie near you
The boundless plain
all its tulips blown right
left the wind
errorless colorsetter

the garden observes

it's necessary for us to be transformed each moment
in an icon
Toute la mer et tout le ciel pour une seule
victoire d'enfance
in other words something slight but also
important enough for
magic to move our hand
and interpret it according to how shadows
change position

as if
they have already received God's portion

as did the Saints in other times.

Loucas van den Berg, a shimmering horse in Volterra

The owls call out and answer back to one another. Five o'clock in the morning. The bird chatter had started in the evening's twilight. Presently, in the early morning mist I search for them and stand staring across the fields. There is no future. I can hear it clearly. The woman pointing out Elba in the distance, is asleep. Her husband has gone. Every now and then he drives up with a trunk-load of fire logs. Ever so swiftly, he disappears again. And, as often, there is a girl with long wavy hair that I adopt. We have played with Italian words, sounds of fantasy and Etruscan names. We have counted the number of bends in the road to Volterra. There are more than one hundred and twenty.

I feel a longing for exhaustive and pensive thoughts now that the earth is still rumourless. The wet grass under my feet. Afar, the hills reaching to the sea, there where the phantom horses seem to dissolve. When I spoke to her of the sturdy Etruscan horses, God-like creatures as with the Celts, their figures cast in bronze or drawn on chalky ground, we heard a neighing horse. They know, she said, that we are talking about them.

As for me: they are not horses, they are angels ploughing the earth, cherishing a memory of gold, talking of people of a bygone era and just then we heard yet another horse whinnying, right on the far side of the hill...We drew horses in the earth

with sticks, robust and free, their heads facing the stars above. These are for the night sky, she said, look, and she pointed with her stick to the contours of a shimmering horse.

The Garden Observes

it's enough the Integral not be accomplished
and Fortune feel fortunate, it's necessary for us to be mindful
of the most fearsome goodness ever given by one man to another,
love, ding, flash, shattering ...

A secret poem from the battlefield to Madeleine Pages

The cold seeps back the terrible cold
Under the tent canvas
And I write you my poem that I sing while writing
I write it lying on the ground
The cold seeps back the cold without fire
For there is no more wood
Hear the muffled thuds of the canons cheering for you
Hear
Hear the love-cry rising from a pining army

Send me your breasts as two homing pigeons
No, save them and send me the cooing of a pair of doves

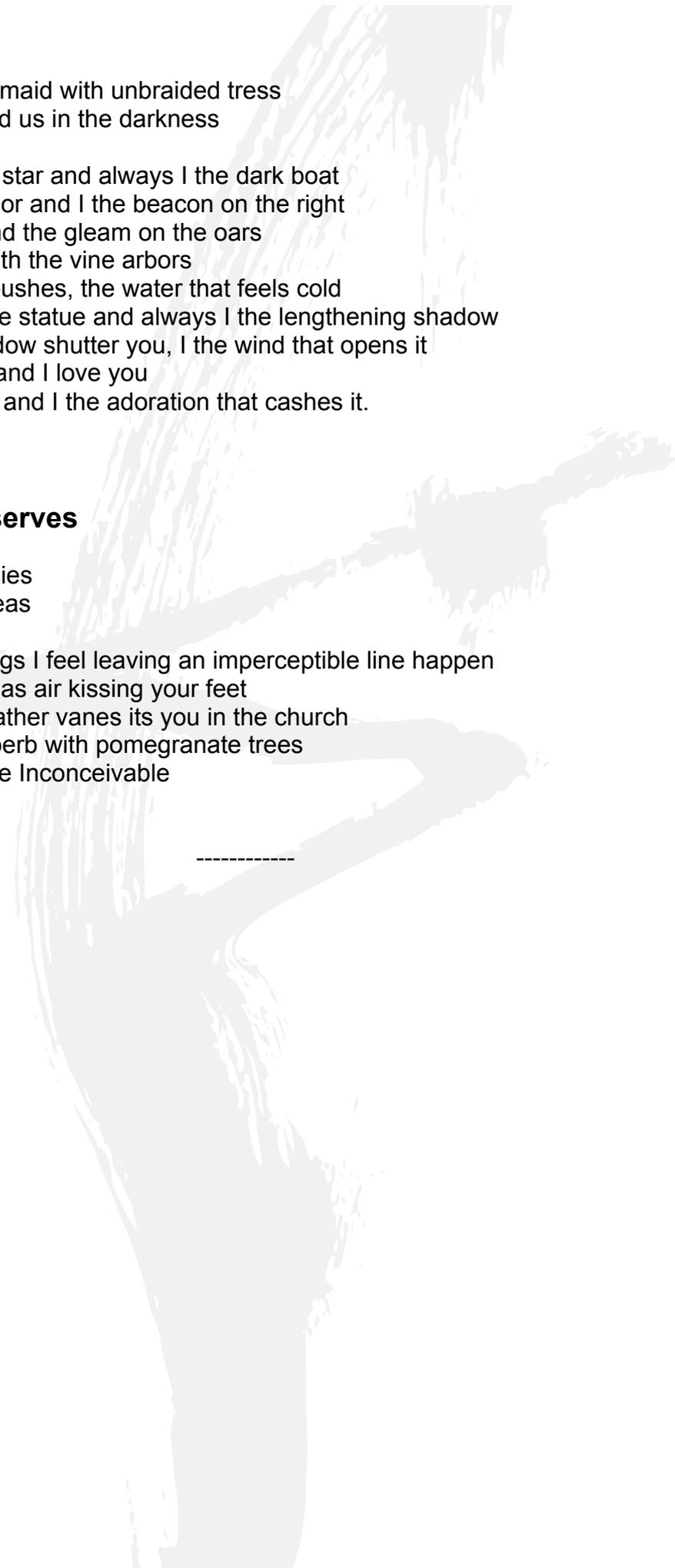
I am building a bridge between you and me of steely flesh

Guillaume Apollinaire, 1915

About Love (from Odysseas Elytis, The Monogram)

I mourn the sun and I mourn the years that come without us and I sing
The others that have passed
The two little animals, our hands
That sought to climb secretly one on the other
The pot of baby's breath through open yard gates
And the pieces of seas coming together
Behind the hedgerows, above the stone walls
The anemone that lay in your hand

If these are true I sing
The wooden beam and the square weaving



On the wall, the Mermaid with unbraided tress
The cat who watched us in the darkness

Always you the little star and always I the dark boat
Always you the harbor and I the beacon on the right
The wet dockwall and the gleam on the oars
High in the house with the vine arbors
The bound-up rosebushes, the water that feels cold
Always you the stone statue and always I the lengthening shadow
The half-closed window shutter you, I the wind that opens it
Because I love you and I love you
Always you the coin and I the adoration that cashes it.

The Garden Observes

Tufts on tufts of daisies
Flammable white ideas
And sea birds
Even before the things I feel leaving an imperceptible line happen
The mountains light as air kissing your feet
The cock on the weather vanes its you in the church
The icon-screen superb with pomegranate trees
Your hand copies the Inconceivable

The text in this booklet contain parts of the performance 'A song in this landscape of anger', a theater monologue by Loucas van den Berg (AMEG), opening in the Lindenberg Centre for the Arts, Nijmegen, on November 6th, 2016 and repeated on March 11th 2017.

Monologue written by Loucas van den Berg.
Images: Loucas van den Berg (AMEG).
Layout and video: Amir Fahimnia (Faktor 22).
English translation: Monique Greup-Diesveldt.

Texts taken from:

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- Guillaume Apollinaire, Poèmes Secrets, geheime gedichten, vertaald uit het Frans door Paul Claes, uitgeverij Vleugels Franse reeks 2016.
- Guillaume Apollinaire, Letters to Madeleine. Tender as memory. Edited by Laurence Campa, translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith, Seagull books, London 2010.

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