Michel de Certeau, everyday life and cultural policy studies in education

Abstract

This chapter considers the work of Michel de Certeau in relation to cultural approaches to policy studies. The chapter explores concepts of culture as everyday practice, and policy as cultural practice, and argues that policy and culture are reciprocal and co-constitutive. The chapter examines the importance of understanding the everyday activities and meaning-making practices of policy makers and stakeholders, as well as (meta)methodology and the ethical and political implications of Certeau's work for approaches to policy research.

Chapter description

This chapter considers cultural approaches to policy studies, informed by cultural theorist Michel de Certeau. It considers how theories and methodologies concerned with the everyday can illuminate the dynamics of 'policy cultures' (Stein, 2004). Conceptual tools examined here include culture as everyday practice, and policy as cultural practice. This recognises the dynamic and productive nature of the everyday, and constitutes policy within a proliferation of cultural practices that can be subverted, resisted and reconfigured (Certeau, 1984). The chapter argues that cultural approaches to policy analysis need to be grounded in a thorough understanding of the everyday activities and meaning-making practices of those who are the makers, analysts, targets, beneficiaries, implementers and end-users of policy. For each of these, education policy produces meanings, enactments and effects that need to be considered in dialogue with extant and emergent cultural practices. The first part of the chapter discusses conceptual tools of

culture, practice and policy, and the second turns to questions of (meta)methodology and the ethical and political implications of Certeau's work for approaches to policy research.

Conceptual tools: Culture, practice and policy

As a cultural theorist, Michel de Certeau's work is profoundly concerned with the heterogenous practices of everyday life. These he takes as a focus in historiographical, psychoanalytic, anthropological, religious and political writings, and as the ground for the 'methodological imagination' (Highmore, 2006: 2) from which his analytic work proceeds. Certeau is particularly interested in the reciprocal relations between everyday practices, logics and social orders, each working on other in to constitute dynamic and continually evolving cultures. In much of his work, he envisages and elaborates culture and practice beyond sites of scholarly description and analysis, in order to 'provide an ethical provocation for thinking about how we might dispense an obligation to the ordinary. This ethical provocation is accompanied by an invitation to "listen otherwise" to the ordinary and to the texts it might hide in' (Highmore, 2001: 254-255). This section of the chapter explores these concepts in relation to the reciprocal relationships of education, policy and cultural practices and production; the significance of heterogeneity in cultural approaches to policy analysis, and ethical demands that accompany cultural approaches to policy analysis.

A central premise of this chapter, which is woven throughout Certeau's work, is an understanding of ordinary, everyday practices – described by Certeau as '"ways of operating' or doing things' (Certeau, 1984: xi) – as something of theoretical and

methodological significance to all domains of social activity. It is the plurality of everyday practices and their 'systems of operational combination', he argues, 'which compose a "culture"' (Certeau, 1984: xi). This interest in the everyday draws upon, yet differs somewhat from, analytic traditions that posit 'an elementary unit—the individual—on the basis of which groups are supposed to be formed and to which they are supposed to be always reducible' (1984: xi). This is not to imply that the individual is discounted in Certeau's work, but rather to suggest that the irreducibility of the individual requires analysis to proceed from the cultural.

Certeau takes the multiplicity and heterogeneity of the everyday and its vocabularies, logics and relations of practice as primary sites of analysis. The practice of everyday life, for Certeau, is not merely a matter of cultural reproduction or the embodiment of a habitus acquired through social interactions and cultural norms. Rather, he sees everyday practices as productive of cultures that are in a continual process of being re-worked and re-made by ordinary, creative and often unanticipated activities, appropriations and resistances. Thus his interest is in showing how the often unmarked practices of everyday life both produce and open up spaces for change within cultural logics, relational networks, and institutions and operational systems. This has implications for the way that Certeau and scholars of his work perceive policy not merely as a strategy of institutional power *but also* as a form of cultural practice in which the everyday is imbricated.

The policies, institutions, texts and practices of education are important sites in the production of culture, and several decades of socially critical educational research have

highlighted the importance of understanding how education policy, schooling and educational experiences can function in shaping subjectivities and social relations (see Ball, Maguire & Braun, 2012; Gillborn & Youdell, 2000; Youdell, 2011). As Noel Preston and Colin Symes once observed, '…education has become one of the core cultural experiences of modern life' (1992: 4), and as such needs to be understood as enmeshed within, rather than as separate to, cultural life. This view is consistent with Jeremy Ahearn's contention that education policies and practices work on everyday culture, '[instituting] forms or aspects of popular culture when they bring into their embrace all of a nation's people and become a routine part of popular experience' (Ahearne, 2011: 422) This work on culture via education is of course profoundly political, and is a primary means by which governments endeavour to act upon the values, beliefs, dispositions, goals and activities of populations. It is also a significant mechanism through which individuals, families, and communities are positioned in relation to each other, institutions, the state, and society more broadly. Thus as a 'political strategy that looks to work on the culture of the territory over which it presides' (Ahearne, 2009: 143), education can be considered in terms of what Ahearne refers to as an 'implicit cultural policy'. Education policy seeks to have an 'effective impact on the nation's culture of its action as a whole' (Ahearne, 2009: 144), and therefore functions as 'the basic foundation of a nation's cultural policy' (Ahearne, 2006: 9).

Educational and policy research have also been shown to have a cultural role in contributing new lenses for understanding, 'not only in that we can see things differently but also in that we may be able to see problems where we did not see them before' (Biesta, 2007: 297). This is not to suggest that educational policy research alters

or determines practices in a simple transfer of knowledge and ideas or a leveraging of changes to educational practice. Rather, such research provides provocations to reflect and think anew, and invitations to reconfigure ways of being, knowing and doing that are part of a dialogue in which cultures of professional practice, educational institutions, and educational experience are formulated. Within these broader landscapes of educational policy, practice and experience, policy cultures emerge with their own language, behaviors, rituals and norms. However, as Ian Burkitt has observed:

> …most social theory and philosophy overlooks this necessary relation between the official and the unofficial realms of everyday life. Instead, the focus is drawn towards either the official codification and normalization of practices and the institutional apparatuses of the state or to the emergent properties of daily life, as if these are two uncoupled realms (2004: 15).

Cultural approaches to policy analysis are concerned with precisely these reciprocal relations between policy domains and everyday life, which are understood as co-extensive and co-implicated, rather than as separate domains. It is important to avoid thinking of policy cultures in terms of local responses to policies that have emanated from elsewhere (Stein, 1004). Rather, policy cultures are understood in terms of a recursive relationship that 'allows for consideration of the influence of local practice on congressional discourse as well as resistance to and adaptation of policy problem and solution definitions at various moments of the policy process' (Stein, 2004: xii). Scholars of Certeau's work similarly see policy and culture as operating reciprocally. Burkitt, for example, argues that 'There are aspects of everyday relations and practices

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more open to government, institutionalization, and official codification, while others are more resistant and provide the basis for opposition and social movements' (2004: 211). This is not to suggest that everyday life is distinct or separate from 'official' practices in institutional and policy domains, but rather 'as the single plane of immanence in which these two forms of practice and articulation interrelate and affect one another' (2004: 211). While forms of practice may differ, they are nonetheless permeable to one another. The 'everyday' in this sense refers both to codified and normalized practices such as those associated with institutions and the state *as well as* informal 'practices and articulations of experience.'(2004: 2011) These, Burkitt insists, "should not be uncoupled in social analysis, as they are necessarily interrelated in processes of social and political change" (2004: 211).

A cultural approach to policy analysis, then, is concerned with more than policy formation, implementation, outcomes and effects, and moves beyond policy enactments as they are interpreted and translated by actors in educational contexts (Maguire & Ball, 1994; Maguire, Ball & Braun, 2010). Instead, it directs analytical attention to both the everyday practices that influence policy discourse, as well as attending to 'the multiple meanings that policies engender, through the myriad interpretations of policy makers, policy implementers, policy target populations and policy analysts" (Stein, 2004: 6). Cultural policy analysis is thus interested in how policy shapes culture, how culture shapes policy, and how in so doing, both are reinvented in multiple ways.

Certeau's contribution to cultural policy analysis lies in part in attending to the everyday in order to make 'explicit the systems of operational combination…which also compose

a "culture"' (1984: xi). While a good deal of Certeau's work is concerned with ways of doing, using, making, appropriating, resisting, and 'making do', his project is not, as Ian Buchanan suggests, concerned so much with 'the study of the everyday in its particulars' (2000: 98), nor is it located at the site of the individual *per se*. Instead, Certeau considers how culture is spoken, written and practiced through embodied, individual subjects in 'an analysis of culture from the mute perspectives of the body, the cry, and the murmur, none of which needs to be identified with a specific, knowable individual, in order to be apprehended' (Buchanan, 2000: 97-98). The analysis of everyday practices thus becomes a means by which the nuance, complexity and heterogeneity of policy cultures can be considered as mutually constitutive.

With respect to education, the reciprocity between policy, analysis and culture may be apprehended through a whole range of everyday practices that are readily recognisable within a particular policy milieu. In one sense, education policy might be seen as being simultaneously imposed and enacted, resisted and subverted, and reconfigured in everyday practice by principals, teachers, students, parents or community members in ways not necessarily anticipated or intended by those who produced and authorised it. Certeau refers to these kinds of relations or 'ways of operating' (1984: xiv) in terms of 'strategies' and 'tactics' (1984: xvii-xx). For Certeau, the function of institutional strategies – be they policy pronouncements, procedural requirements, or hierarchical relations – is to structure, conceal and maintain operations of power, in order to keep those without a 'proper place' within the institution at a distance. Tactics, on the other hand, are the operations of the weak against the strong – fleeting incursions and 'guileful ruses' (Certeau, 1984: 37) that accomplish temporary moments of agency and

resistance, but that are unlikely to significantly alter the operations of power concealed and maintained by institutional strategies.

This conceptualisation is one of Certeau's better-known contributions to cultural analysis, and has not been without its critics. However, critiques such as Frow's (1991), tend toward reading strategies and tactics as dichotomous and oppositional. There are clearly distinctions in Certeau's work between the operational logics of institutions and the spatial territories and hierarchies of power they demarcate, and the more fragmentary, disruptive tactics of the everyday. However, the interplay between them allows for the emergence new and unanticipated possibilities. According to Colebrook, 'A tactic works metaphorically: rather than returning the logic to some ground, it thinks the logic from a different point of view.' (Colebrook, 2001: 546-547). Indeed, Certeau insists on the productive potential for the interplay of strategies and tactics to formulate cultures and inaugurate institutions anew. He sees this interplay as key to what policy is and accomplishes in cultural terms, observing that 'A policy is characterized by linking a tactic to a strategy' (Certeau, 1997: 79) The operational logics of strategies, however static they may appear, and the logics of everyday practices, however resistant or subversive, are both reciprocal and permeable and therefore able to be remade in symbolic and material ways. The interplay of strategies and tactics is not simply a struggle between the weak and the strong, but rather plays an important part in refiguring everyday cultural beliefs and practices over time.

While policy may form new links in the interplay of strategies and tactics, these links operate in dialogue with what has gone before. For de Certeau, the management of

society in its multiple forms, including the introduction of new policy agendas leaves behind cultural 'remainders' (1997a) – residual beliefs, expressions, meanings and practices. These are simultaneously reinvented and reworked, and in the process inaugurate new cultural formations that may not be immediately recognised as such.

> A reciprocity thus replaces "transmission" or the "integration" of the past. A new organization is inaugurated. But it is not yet recognized for what it is. It is folded into older structures as if it were a vice, whereas in reality it invents a new structure, that is, different relations among categories that have changed. (Certeau, 1997: 89)

This theoretical framework and its emphasis on everyday practice as cultural formation enables us to retheorise both extant and emergent configurations of everyday policy cultures, and leads to considerations of education policy as culture producing. Such a framework has methodological implications for policy researchers, drawing attention to both "the historical moment in which a policy develops and the structural realities of institutions responsible for its implementation" (Stein, 2004: 6). Yet simultaneously, cultural policy analysis informed by Certeau takes account of 'the tragic frailty of policy' (2000: 29), and recognises the inadequacy of any policy vision or initiative in the absence of an accounting for the everyday and its relationship to policy and cultural production.

Another significant contribution made by Certeau to policy studies and taken up extensively by scholars of Certeau's work (Ahearne, 2001, 2004, 2009, 2011; Highmore,

2002, 2006) is his commitment to heterogeneity and the recognition of complicity in cultural production. This insistence in Certeau's work is informed by his interest in the 'marginality of a majority' (1984: xvi), and attends to heterogeneity, multiplicity and *un*manageability, insisting on an ethics of recognition and a commitment to everyday culture and its proliferation of practice as that which is 'already taking place' (Highmore, 2006: 157). For Certeau, the cartographic impulse that would map and articulate practices in order to render them knowable and bring them within grids of intelligibility and the gaze of regulatory frameworks, misses the point that '…we do not yet know what to make of other, equally infinitesimal procedures that have remained unprivileged by history yet which continue to flourish in the interstices of the institutional technologies' (1986: 189).

Certeau's contribution to policy studies is therefore predicated on his insistence that policy itself must be grounded in a recognition of that which cannot be captured or assimilated – everyday practices and tactical maneuvers in relation to the social order:

> A practice of the order constructed by others redistributes its space; it creates at least a certain play in that order, a space for maneuvers of unequal forces and utopian points of reference. That is where the opacity of a 'popular' culture could be said to manifest itself – a dark rock that resists all assimilation. (1984: 18)

While policy may attempt to establish orders that create parameters and shape social spaces within which people must operate, here Certeau underscores the impossibility of

any established order apprehending cultural practices that exceed all such attempts. The proliferation of heterogenous practices calls instead for a conception of cultural policy that creates space for others to operate and flourish. It also calls for new ways of attending in methodological terms to policy work that "is dedicated to fashioning spaces more hospitable to the voices of others; and…completely committed to siding with the unmanageability of the ordinary and the radical heterogeneity of the multitude." (Highmore, 2006: 153).

This is a recurring interest in Certeau's theoretical and policy work, which maintains an insistence on the incommensurability of cultural practices despite policy attempts to define and shape them. For Ahearne, 'Certeau's analyses tend to decentre the ambition of strategic decision-makers to mould the social body in the image of their policy programmes' (Ahearne, 2004: 78). This is not to imply that unity or coherence can be attained simply by attending to the everyday, but rather to insist that the creativity, heterogeneity and 'often unpredictable re-employments to which users subject the cultural resources at their disposal (Ahearne, 2004, 12) merit legitimate spaces in which to operate. Rather than looking for threads that bind the social fabric, Certeau insists instead on looking for openings within it. The 'obligation to the ordinary' (Highmore, 2001) is not just concerned with describing and documenting. Rather, in looking for "interruptions and fissures which put in question strategies of control and reproduction" (Ahearne, 1995: 191), he shows not just the operations, but also the limits of political, administrative and disciplinary procedures and mechanisms. This concern is theoretical as well as methodological, and for Certeau, leads to a '*polemological* analysis of culture'

(1984: xvii, original emphasis) in which theory is forced 'to recognize its own limits.'
(Highmore, 2001: 257).

Certeau also maintains an insistence on uncovering how 'instances of "implicit" alterity
involve interpreters in forms of "complicity"' (Ahearne, 1995: 131) in efforts to bring
heterogenous populations into conformity and compliance with political agendas.
According to Cravetto, Certeau's body of work shows how

> …the pretence of being objective and scientific – distort the question addressed
> to the object of the research. Only the assumption by the researcher of his lived
> experience and his history allows him to free himself from the constraints
> typical of knowledge techniques and technical knowledge (Cravetto, 2003: 122).

This recognition, referred to by Ahearne as 'interpretive complicity' (1995: 128) brings
policy analysis into focus as itself a subjective process. While Certeau was cautious of
turning 'the human subject into the prime object of policy' as such (Ahearne, 2001:
456), his interest in opening up of space for a plurality of relations and practices 'sets up
the space of human subjectivity', for agency and room to manoeuver' (Ahearne, 2001:
457).

Yet the interpreter/analyst is no innocent bystander in this subjective space. Positioned
in multiple ways, the analyst/interpreter's complicity in the regulatory and
homogenizing endeavours of political programmes, the production of policy and expert
knowledges, their conditions of possibility and the cultures in which they are implicated

cannot be overlooked or treated as an irrelevant indulgence. The 'expert' and scientific practices that establish disciplinary and discursive authority are implicated in a conceptual cleavage that separates everyday life from the domain of knowledge production, thereby constituting 'the *whole* as its remainder; this remainder has become what we call culture' (Certeau, 1984: 6). Thus theoretical questioning, Certeau insists, '*does not forget,* cannot forget that in addition to the relationship of these scientific discourses to one another, there is also their common relation with what they have taken care to exclude from their field in order to constitute it' (1984: 61, original emphasis). Those closely involved in processes of policy formation and implementation can simultaneously be among its target populations, recipients of its effects and unintended consequences, and everyday makers of its cultures. For the cultural analyst of policy, there are imperatives to interrogate the privilege and practices of one's own particular 'body of analytical techniques' through which a 'science is mobilized' – in order to show "how it introduces itself into our techniques…and how it can reorganize the place from which discourse is produced' (Certeau, 1984: 5)

(Meta)methodology: writing and practising cultures

Certeau's work spans a remarkable range of disciplinary fields, philosophical influences, scholarly and political concerns, thorough discussion of which is not possible here. While he defined himself primarily as a historian (Ahearne, 2001), his contribution to thought is largely considered a metamethodological one (Highmore, 2007). Scholars of his work argue that his methodological imagination is one that 'seeks to alter the very meeting ground for attending to culture' (Highmore, 2006:2). This

approach is not readily tethered to methodology as a tool-kit for acquiring, describing and analysing objects or data. Rather, it uses 'method and methodology to name the characteristics of our scholarly and intellectual contact with the world' (Highmore, 2006:2). Methodology, for de Certeau, is a way of being in, and communicating with and about the world – a contact zone for the writing of culture, rather than the analysing of culture *per se*. Thus Certeau's methodological practice constitutes a form of attention to logics of practice and ways of operating whose own practices are simultaneously co-implicated and subject to scrutiny.

These concerns persist throughout his work, and underpin his approach to, for example, history, which he envisages as '…a practice (a discipline), its results (a discourse), and the relation between them' (Certeau, 1988:102). The writing of history, for Certeau, cannot be separated from the work of the historian. It is a process that takes place within institutional and discursive conditions that shape history-writing as a particular form of labour, and that create history as a text or product with absences, silences and exclusions. Insisting on history-writing as a social practice, his approach is characterized by:

> …scrutinising that which has been selectively filtered out, veiled, or reversed in the writing process. He argues that what historians do in the practice of history—collecting, arranging and analysing documents—is frequently the opposite of what they do in writing it (Reekie, 1995: 52).

Such concerns are reflected in the ethical demand of Certeau's work across fields as

diverse as religion, psychoanalysis, cultural policy, ethnology and history is located in this concern with 'the business of writing human culture, a writing of culture in which the ordinary, the everyday is simultaneously both inscribed and excised' (Highmore, 2001: 255). It is a critical interrogation that looks not only to the everyday of others as observable domains, but that asks after the complicity within which that everyday is produced as a knowable artifact of scholarly practice.

Certeau's interest in complicity perhaps most famously finds methodological articulation in his insistence on the limits of theory and scholarship – whether historical, ethnological or political – that confine culture and analyst to separate domains without accounting for their relations of co-implication. Thus he observes:

> The Bororos of Brazil sink slowly into their collective death, and Lévi-Strauss takes his seat in the French Academy. Even if this injustice disturbs him, the facts remain unchanged. This story is ours as much as his. In this one respect (which is an index of others that are more important), the intellectuals are still borne on the backs of the common people (Certeau, 1984: 25).

This provocation speaks to a significant theoretical and methodological concern across Certeau's extensive body of work, which 'centre[s] on a critical epistemology and an ethical demand to respond to epistemological skepticism' (Highmore, 2007: 16). For Certeau, it is not enough to describe, document, analyse and theorise culture, precisely because the analyst is always already imbricated in it in multiple and problematic ways. Scholarship as a form of cultural writing, therefore, 'can be read as a

metamethodological argument that insists on our obligation to connect to the real in the face of epistemological scepticism' (Highmore, 2007: 14). This very skepticism underpins 'scholarly experimentation, one where permission is granted, not because 'anything goes', but because there is an obligation to find better ways of telling 'the cultural''(Highmore, 2007: 16).

For education researchers interested in cultural policy analysis, methodological approaches informed by Certeau do not attend to questions of researcher reflexivity as a kind of self-indulgent or self-referential gesture toward political correctness, nor as an admission of what is commonly referred to as the 'limitations' of research studies. Rather, the critical and ethical attention to the processes of analytic work is a central premise from which any scholarly inquiry proceeds. This is because such an approach interrogates its own limits while insisting on the heterogenous everyday as always already exceeding the capacity of scholarship to apprehend.

> "The imaginary landscape of an inquiry is not without value, even if it is without rigor. It restores what was earlier called 'popular culture,' but it does so in order to transform what was represented as a matrix-force of history into a mobile infinity of tactics. It thus keeps before our eyes the structure of a social imagination in which the problem constantly takes different forms and begins anew" (Certeau, 1984: 41).

Tactics and the practices of the everyday function here not merely as objects of inquiry. Instead they are central to an ethics and politics of practice within 'a metamethodology

which is dedicated to encouraging heterogeneity and allowing alterity to proliferate' (Highmore, 2007: 16).

Certeau's interest in heterogeneity and that which disrupts structures and logics of practice does not imply a particular method or set of methodological tools. Rather it presumes a commitment to social scenes of proliferation and incommensurability, requiring analysis to proceed from fragmentary moments and unanticipated events. It insists on "the encounter between the plurality of everyday practice, its irreducibility and un-intelligibility, and the narratives of and at the margins" (Napolitano & Pratten, 2007: 10). This polemological approach, as Highmore explains, places '…"theory" and "method"…into crisis as they encounter the everyday world. Such an approach can't be measured in terms of descriptive realism but should be judged in terms of its ability to generate new possibilities in an encounter with the ordinary' (Highmore, 2001: 257).

Certeau's own cultural policy research in the 1970s – 1980s provides examples of his approach to policy analysis and participation in policy processes. Through his involvement with the research unit of the French Ministry of Culture, the Council for Cultural Development, and the National Plan (Ahearne, 2004: 12), Certeau undertook several projects that would contribute to French cultural policy debates and exert influence in policy development circles. An extended discussion of his cultural policy work during this period is not possible here, however, Ahearne's detailed analyses (2001, 2004) highlight Certeau's recognition of the co-implication of academics in the constitution of policy cultures, and his relentless commitment to the heterogeneity of everyday life. For Certeau, engaging in policy research and consultative projects was a pragmatic intervention in which he endeavoured 'to overturn the frames of reference

then dictating national cultural policy' (Ahearne, 2001: 448). His interest was not in supplanting one overarching framework with another, but rather in marking 'a space for alterity in reflection on cultural process' (Ahearne, 2001: 458). As Ahearne notes, 'The intervention [Certeau] posits is designed less to model society than to enable the individuals and groups that compose that society to intervene more forcefully in the shaping of their own social world" (Ahearne, 2001: 456). The practice of research and policy analysis are guided by

> …respect for the ability of individuals and groups to intervene creatively in society, recognition of the social subject's need for a plurality of interpretative systems, and commitment to assuring a meaningful two-way interaction between such interpretative systems (or cultural models) and
> effective social structures (Ahearne, 2001: 458)

Certeau's meta-methodological approach, guided by an understanding of policy and culture as co-constitutive, opens up spaces for understanding analytic practice as part of policy cultures conceived in the broadest sense. The practice of policy analysis, in other words, is understood as a practice of culture – whether in the form of research, government consultation, scholarly critique, political activism, or programmatic development and experimentation. For Certeau, such practices are resolutely committed to heterogeneity, such that the guiding objective of policy interventions irrespective of their form is 'to support and build up those cultures already to be found among the population' (Ahearne, 2004, 14).

Conclusion

Attending to the co-implication of culture, everyday practice and policy involves more than employing a set of methodological procedures in order to render a particular policy and its effects on groups or practices visible. Instead it involves a response to 'an ethical provocation for thinking about how we might dispense an obligation to the ordinary. This ethical provocation is accompanied by an invitation to "listen otherwise" to the ordinary and to the texts it might hide in' (Highmore, 2001: 254-255). Responding to this provocation that is central to Certeau's work most certainly involves, in a methodological sense, attending to the heterogeneity and alterity of everyday cultural practice as the starting point. Importantly, however, it requires a response to the political and ethical insistence that policy researchers attend to the ordinary and the 'otherwise' through which the cultures of their own fields of practice are formed and remade, and through which the broader everyday is constituted.

Suggested Readings of Education Policy Studies

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