The recent focus on literacy in Social Studies has been on linguistic design, particularly that related to the grammar of written and spoken text. When students are expected to produce complex hybridized genres such as timelines, a focus on the teaching and learning of linguistic design is necessary but not sufficient to complete the task. Theorizations of new literacies identify five interrelated meaning making designs for text deconstruction and reproduction: linguistic, spatial, visual, gestural, and audio design. Honing in on the complexity of timelines, this paper casts a lens on the linguistic, visual, spatial, and gestural designs of three pairs of primary school aged Social Studies learners. Drawing on a functional metalanguage, we analyze the linguistic, visual, spatial, and gestural designs of their work. We also offer suggestions of their effect, and from there consider the importance of explicit instruction in text design choices for this Social Studies task. We conclude the analysis by suggesting the foci of explicit instruction for future lessons.

Introduction

Whilst the nomenclature for social studies curriculum alters across time and space, in Queensland, Australia, it is known as Studies of the Society and Environment (SOSE) and includes studies that have been variously referred to as history, geography, and environmental studies (Love & Rushton, 2000). The Queensland School Curriculum Council (QSCC) SOSE curriculum (2000) states that SOSE teachers are responsible for focusing on the peculiar literacy demands of their key learning area. Its sentiments echo the mandate of Education Queensland’s (2006) seminal document on literacy, Literacy the key to learning: Framework for action 2006–2008, which states that “[l]iteracy is at the heart of a student’s ability to learn and succeed in school and beyond,” and is integral for effective learning to take place across all areas of discipline (p.2). Both documents are clear in their statements that it is each teacher’s responsibility to develop knowledge of the literacy capabilities students require to succeed in discrete areas of learning.

This research considers the literacy demands besetting students who produce one SOSE text, that of a multimodal timeline during a “History of Transport” project. The remainder of this paper is set out in four sections. The first section introduces the Queensland SOSE syllabus, which provided the impetus for the “History of Transport” timeline. In the section that follows, the integrated meaning making systems of multimodal text are detailed: linguistic, spatial, visual, gestural, and audio design (New London Group, 2000). These are then considered in relation to the model of language advanced by systemic functional linguistics for written, (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004) visual, spatial, and gestural (Hart, 1999; van Leeuwen, 2003) text design. The third section analyzes the linguistic, visual, spatial, and gestural designs evident in the work produced by three pairs of students. The final section discusses the significance of the research, in particular the complexity of hy-
bridized genres such as timelines and the utility of a delicate language of description for multimodal text analyses.

**SOSE Syllabus and “History of Transport” Timeline**

The Queensland Studies Authority (QSA), and its predecessor, the Queensland School Curriculum Council (QSCC), consider SOSE a key learning area. The key values of SOSE are listed as: democratic processes, social justice, ecological, environmental sustainability, and peace. The SOSE learning outcomes are organized into four interrelated strands: Time, Continuity and Change, Place and Space, Culture and Identity, and Systems, Resources, and Power (QSCC, 2000). Five inquiry processes posited as the “essence of SOSE” are investigating, creating, participating, communicating, and reflecting (QSCC, 2000, p. 3). The SOSE syllabus also is considered to contribute to the development of the following attributes: knowledgeable persons with deep understanding; complex thinker(s); effective communicator(s); creative person(s); active investigator(s); participant(s) in an interdependent world; and reflective and self-directed learner(s). The cross-curricula priorities denote the importance of developing literacy skills, in particular how language works, and an ability to apply language skills through reading, writing, speaking, viewing, and listening. Whilst not overtly recognizing the construction of texts other than those that are written or spoken, the need to “critically appraise information, make choices and interpret various levels of meaning” (QSCC, 2000, p. 6) are foregrounded.

This case study was drawn from Sonya’s (Author 1) final year practicum experience whilst a pre-service teacher undertaking a four year Bachelor of Education degree at the Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane, Australia. Sonya’s practicum experience was located at a medium-sized inner-city school with a Year 4 class (aged 8-10 years). Students in this year level would typically be working towards demonstrating Level 3 learning outcomes. Within the Time, Continuity and Change strand, the overarching Level 3 learning outcome is stated as (QSCC, 2000):

Students understand the contributions, causes and effects, and differing perspectives about particular developments in Australia’s history and can use a range of evidence. They also understand how to organize information about these developments and can make predictions about Australia’s environmental and social futures (p. 15).

Suggestions for core content include evidence of innovations in media and technology, including transport (QSCC, 2000). Whilst the “History of Transport” project integrated other investigating, participating, communicating and reflecting outcomes from the Time, Continuity and Change strand as well as other related strands, the specific core learning outcome for this research task was, “Students create sequences and timelines about specific Australian changes and continuities” (QSCC, 2000, p. 15).

To undertake this task, students had to research and report history through the construction of a timeline. A timeline includes elements of note-taking and information report (both report genres). The note-taking component requires the ability to select relevant information and to record it briefly in such a way that the meaning is clear to an anonymous reader. A timeline is more than this written information. It is a semiotic hybrid, simultaneously written, visual, spatial, and gestural. A timeline typically includes: a title; a visual continuum of time; briefly written factual descriptions or explanations pertinent to points of time; and accompanying integrated visuals, either with or without captions. A timeline is not constituted as what Jay Lemke (1998) would term an “ideal” canonical genre. There are many ways to constitute and present a timeline, and presenting it as a robotic posturing around a set of forms is in-
herently problematic. Sonya thus opted to support students’ variations in response to a functional task.

Work from three pairs of students, typical of that produced by the student cohort, has been selected for analysis. These sets were randomly selected from those where both students in the partnership had returned permission forms signed by their parents indicating approval for their child’s work to be included in a publicly available research project. Rather than analyzing the entire set, a typical sample of multimodal text has been selected and reproduced. The three selected samples are reproduced below in Figures One through to Five.

In the publication “Writing Links: Grammar in Studies of Society and the Environment”, Kristina Love and Kathleen Rushton (2000) conceive that the metalanguage developed through English can be used to help students to learn about language in SOSE. Such tenets should not be misconstrued as English providing the full complement of SOSE language needs. Claire Wyatt-Smith and Joy Cumming (2003) emphasize that each field of knowledge has its own sets of knowing (content knowledge) and ways of representing knowing (literacies). Their thesis is that no single literacy can be spread homogenously across all curricula. What can be spread across curricula are terminologies and skills for examining the patterns of text and how language functions to construct meaning.

The next section of this paper considers a theory for analyzing multimodal text construction. In doing so, it draws upon the seminal theorisations of Michael Halliday (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004) and the empirical work of Theo van Leeuwen (2003) and Philip Hart (1999).

### A Metalanguage for Linguistic, Visual, Spatial and Gestural Design Choices

A metalanguage is a language to talk about language, in this case, multimodal text design. This research focuses on written, visual, spatial, and gestural texts produced by pairs of Year 4 students researching and constructing a historical timeline on a form of transport. The term “grammar” has been used to describe the study of rules governing the use of a written and spoken language, and the relationship of words in a written or spoken utterance, with primary concern being with grammatical structures and their relationships to one another. “Traditional grammar” is a form of grammar that falls into this category, being noted as formal, rigid, with notions of rules, syntactic in focus and oriented towards written or spoken clauses (Halliday, 1979). A complementary approach is to address the function of text communication. Rather than insisting on a clear distinction between what is deemed “grammatical” and “ungrammatical”, as is the case in a traditional analysis, a functional analysis focuses on the form in relation to content and context. In other words, functional grammar focuses on elements in terms of their communicative functions, that is, how written, spoken, visual, gestural, and spatial semiotics are used in a principled and systematic way for making meaning (Derewianka, 2002).

Following M.A.K. Halliday (1978), functional grammar theory enables the identification of three kinds of meanings: ideational meanings that build subject matter or field; interpersonal meanings that construe roles and relationships through tenor; and textual meanings that construct the mode and medium, or flow of a text (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). In written and spoken texts, almost every clause of English simultaneously expresses these three aspects of meaning. These three functions can be used as a tool for examining the meaning making potential of visual, spatial and gestural text (van Leeuwen, 2003).

To think about grammar as a resource for making and exchanging meanings, it is necessary to explore what these might mean in relation to meaning itself.

- **Ideational** meaning refers to the way language represents experiences of the
world, as well as inner thoughts and feelings, from the familiar world through to the abstract. Ideational meanings are realized through field or subject matter. In written text, subject matter can be identified through processes (what is going on), participants (who or what in relation to the process), and/or circumstances (why, when, where, how and with whom in relation to the process). In visual, spatial, or gestural text, the subject matter is still represented through the actions (processes), participants, and setting (circumstances) identifiable through the text.

- **Interpersonal** meaning has to do with the ways in which text producers and consumers exchange meaning. Interpersonal meanings are realised through tenor or put another way, through the roles and relationships of producers and consumers of text. In written texts, roles and relationships are exchanged by making an offer, presenting a statement, giving a command, or asking a question (Halliday & Mattiessen, 2004). In visual, spatial, or gestural text, exchange is constructed by viewpoint and/or viewer/subject orientation, that is, the placement of the viewer and subject in relation to one another (Hart, 1999).

- **Textual** meaning relates to the ways in which text is organized and connected. Written text can be organized and connected through devices such as Theme (the point of departure of the message), Rheme (the remainder of the message), conjunctions, and references (for example, pronouns) (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). In visual, spatial, or gestural text, meaning is realized through composition and form. Composition refers to the concepts associated with the organization or arrangement (Hart, 1999). Form refers to the media and techniques used, tools, and surfaces.

Undertaking an analysis of multimodal text is complex. This is because ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings intersect; they unfold simultaneously, whilst each contributes different structures to a text (Ravelli, 2006). The following section introduces the three pairs of case study students and an analysis of their timeline texts. It should be noted that the cooperative nature of group work meant that it was not possible to identify specifically which student was responsible for which part of the text. The comments focus on identifying the significant textual features present and absent in the students’ multimodal texts so that this analysis becomes a resource for further planning.

**Case Study Students and Their Timeline Texts**

Figure 1: Sample of timeline text provided by Andrew and Benson
Figure 1 is a sample of the text produced by Andrew and Benson, two nine year old boys. Their work displays their developing skills with electronic text. The written component can be analyzed through consideration of field, tenor, and mode. An analysis of field (identified through participants, processes, and circumstances) and mode (Theme and cohesion) appears in Table 1. Theme is denoted by the boxes that are shaded. Words understood, but not included in the text, are represented in brackets.

Table 1: Analysis of Andrew and Benson’s written text

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Processes</th>
<th>Circumstances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 George Stephenson</td>
<td>built the first locomotive.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 It</td>
<td>carried</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Old locomotive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 George Stephenson’s train</td>
<td>(is located)</td>
<td>in museum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>6 loaded coal cars and 21 passengers.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Peter Cooper</td>
<td>built the steam locomotive.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Peter Cooper’s train</td>
<td>(is)</td>
<td>in a museum.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This analysis of mode and field shows that the author of this text, either Andrew or Benson, writes in simple sentences that tend to commence with information about ‘who’ or ‘what’ (participants), followed by an action process (items 2, 3, 5, and 7). In these sentences, the participant groups range in size from single pronouns (It) and names of individuals (George Stephenson) to short word groups (6 loaded coal cars). These short word groups are called nominal groups and in this case include a numerative (6), epithet (loaded), classifier (coal), and the head noun (cars). To make meaning from the Theme of item 3 (It), links are needed to the participant in the Rheme from item 2 (the first locomotive). The first locomotive (item 2) is repackaged as It. This cohesion across a sequence of clauses contributes to the organization of the text. The dominance of action processes gives a strong sense that the history of this mode of transport revolves around “doing”. In other places the author explicitly locates the notion of time (temporal circumstance) as a stand-alone item (1550, 1830). The author understands the purpose of a timeline is to foreground a continuum of time. The captions under each visual text (items 4, 5, and 8) show an ability to reduce to essence. On each occasion the author has effectively omitted the process. On one occasion (item 4), the author omitted a human participant. Spatial circumstances (place) are included in items 5 and 8. It is not surprising that temporal (time) and spatial (place) circumstances dominate a timeline. A declarative tenor realizes statements of fact, thereby constructing Andrew and Benson’s role as information givers and their readers as information receivers. The grammatical mood is rather distant and adds to the text’s authority.

The visuals added to the text include a copy of black ink on white paper drawing and copies of two color photographs of restored trains in a museum. The black ink on white paper, being the smallest of the visuals, marks it as less important relative to the two color images. The black ink on white paper drawing emphasizes the rhythmic processes of the locomotive blowing black smoke and white steam and the active process of the workers on the platform. All of this is taking place within an authentic circumstance of a train station, which serves to create harmony between the locomotive and its context. The black ink on white paper sketch emphasizes repetition of line (front blade of train) and contrasting
colors (black smoke vis-à-vis white steam). This picture constructs an equal relationship with the viewer by virtue of the viewing angle. In contrast, the museum trains are presented as still life in a non-authentic circumstance (museum). Dominance of color, power, and strength (by virtue of the low camera angles and a mid-range social distance) are emphasized. The photographs of the trains in the museum promote the power of this mode of transport albeit in a dislocated place.

Other designs produced by either Andrew or Benson include a spatial design. The title, “History of Trains”, is top and center, thereby establishing its significance. The use of variegated color represents both graduation and change in the field. The addition of a shadow could be representative of passing time, but it’s not known if the author was conscious of such detail. Blocks of color divide dates from other written text. Captions are separated by borders and white space. The text follows a traditional Western print-based orthodoxy of top to bottom, left to right, therefore, it may have been seen as unnecessary to include explicit gestures to orientate a viewer through their text. In summary, meaning is realized by interconnected semiotics. There are no references from the written text to the visual text. This is an aspect of design we would like to promote in future lessons with these two students.

Figure 2: Sample of timeline text provided by Carla and Hailey

This timeline for the history of trams (see Figure 2) and accompanying photos (see Figure 3) were submitted by Carla and Hailey, both nine years of age. They elected to manually produce their written text and glue in photocopies of black and white photographs of trams for their visual contribution. Excerpts of their text are reproduced in Table 2 and analyzed below in terms of field (participants, processes, and circumstances) and mode (Theme and conjunctions). Again, the Theme of each clause is identified by shading.

There are no references from the written text to the visual text. This is an aspect of design we would like to promote in future lessons with these two students. (p. 22)
Again, it is not possible to define who was responsible for the work of this timeline. Either Carla or Hailey used simple sentences (items 2, 4, and 6) and built the participant groups to include deictic (the), numerative (first), classifiers (cable and tram), and the head noun (line). Interestingly, these participants are all non-human, as compared to Andrew and Benson’s list which includes human participants. In Carla and Hailey’s work, all processes for items 2, 4, and 6 are action processes. Significantly, the author changed the orientation of item 4 to Thematize a spatial circumstance. This promotes the import of location, rather than information about “who” or ”what” (participants). Like Andrew and Benson’s text, this text presents temporal circumstances as stand-alone items (1885, 1881, 1898). This highlights an understanding of the purpose of timelines to orientate the reader to a continuum of time. A declarative tenor is realized through statements of fact, thereby constructing Carla and Hailey as information givers and positioning readers as information receivers. The relatively distant grammatical mood positions the reader to accept the knowledge as unproblematic.

In the two photocopies (see Figure 3) of the monochrome photographs, the subject matter is a tram (participant) working (process) within an authentic context (spatial circumstance). The authenticity of the environment, and thus the harmony of the image, is enhanced in the top picture through the existence of shadows, and in the bottom picture where vehicles of the era are visible. Both trams also have travel destinations showing on their windows. At the same time, there is a vivid contrast between that which is man-made (trams and roadway) and that which is natural (trees). This contrast is shown through the sharp lines and shape of the trams compared with the billowing free-form lines and shapes of the trees, which also suggest movement. Movement is suggested by the passing of time (shadows) and seasons (deciduous trees). The composition of each photo-

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Table 2: Analysis of Carla and Hailey’s written text

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Processes</th>
<th>Circumstances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1885</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The first cable tram line was operated by the Melbourne Tramway and Omnibus Company.</td>
<td>1881</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>In Licherfelde near Berlin, Germany</td>
<td>1898</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>the first electric tramline was opened.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The last horse drawn tram was operated.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
graph emphasizes the repetition of shape (rectangular windows), and in the bottom photo, the contrasting lines of the safety stripes. Both photographs have been arranged to promote the design, physical, and social power of the machinery via the low camera angle.

Their decision to use one color pencil for the range of item types, for example, listing dates, drawing lines, and written sentences, creates a harmony of tasks rather than a separation of tasks. It is not known why the decision was made to do this. Harmonization is problematic when it fails to add to the meaning making. The typography of their timeline is atypical in that the dates are not in chronological order, and a separate timeline is produced for each entry. Cohesion is reduced. In relation to spatial layout, there are strong boundaries between the written timeline and the visuals. Although there are captions under each picture, they refer to the model of tram, not the information given in the written text. Unless an audience is familiar with the depiction of model protocol, this information is too abstract and dislocated for novices. It is possible Carla and Hailey have presumed too much in relation to their audience’s field knowledge. Thus these facets warrant attention through teacher instruction.

Emma and Thomas (both 9 years of age) chose to word-process the written component and sketch and color by hand the visual component. Their written component, presented as Figure 5, was significantly longer than that of any of their peers. Their first paragraph is typical of the remainder of their text. In the interests of brevity, this analysis will only focus on the first paragraph. Table 3 outlines the analyses of field (participants, processes, and circumstances) and mode (Theme and conjunctions).
Table 3: Analysis of Emma and Thomas’ Written Text

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Processes</th>
<th>Circumstances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Early 1700’s</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 An unknown Dutchman &lt;&lt;who lived in Holland&gt;&gt;</td>
<td>decided to go ice-skating in summer.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Skating</td>
<td>was popular to travel</td>
<td>at the time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Dry land skating</td>
<td>was formed by nailing wooden spools to strips of wood and attaching them to boots.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A linguistic analysis identifies that the author of this text, be it Emma or Thomas, was able to foreground orientations to time (item 1). Item 2 is remarkable for the complexity of its first participant, where one unit (who lived in Holland) operates inside another (An unknown Dutchman ...). This structural complexity specifies something about the Dutchman as “the one who lived in Holland”. A point of note is the awkwardness of item 3, which probably should read “Skating was a popular form of travel at the time”. This is one of a number of syntactical errors evidenced in other sections of their written work. Texts with syntactical errors compromise meaning. The author has taken a risk here, and it appears more work is needed on syntax. Accompanying this awkwardness are examples of lexical density in item 4, for example, a specialized form of skating, dry land skating, and spools. Even though this analysis only presents their first three sentences, the participant groups differ in some way to those presented in Andrew and Benson’s and Carla and Hailey’s work. Where Andrew and Benson drew on human and concrete participants who could be seen as actors who accomplished goals (build things), Carla and Hailey used non human participants that were either concrete (the last horse drawn train) or entities (the Melbourne Tramway and Omnibus company). Emma and Thomas draw in a range of human (an unknown Dutchman), concrete (skating) and abstractions (popular to travel). This latter text also evidences a more extensive range of process types: action (was formed), mental (decided to go), and relational (was). This shift in the range of process types constructs meaning of the physical world (doing), the world of consciousness (sensing), and the world of abstract relations (being). Of note is the use of a relational process (was) that shows a connection between “skating” and its “popularity at the time”. This text functions to ascribe a value to an entity. This contrasts with Andrew and Benson’s and Carla and Hailey’s work that only communicates meaning of the physical world (doing). Emma and Thomas’ work also evidences a range of circumstantial types, namely spatial (ice-skating), temporal (in summer), and manner (by nailing wooden spools to strips of wood and attaching them to boots). Each of the three sentences (item 2, 3, and 4) includes a circumstance, yet, according to Matthiessen’s research (cited in Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004), general texts contain, on average, 0.45 circumstances per clause. Like the two preceding texts from Andrew and Benson and Carla and Hailey, Emma and Thomas’ categorical statements of fact evidence relative distance, and thus add to the perception of authority. The Themes are all typical. The Rheme of item 2 (decided to go ice skating in summer) establishes a pattern with the Theme of item 3 (Skating). The overall structure is supported by the highlighted subheadings (temporal circumstances, for example, Early 1700’s), which serve to signal the different stages of the text.

There was only one major image, presented as the title page (see Figure 4). This whole page image is a pictorial representation of a photo found in one of the research articles accessed by either Emma or Thomas. The artist employed the organizational visual device of enlargement, thus the visual prominence of the
mid-distance foreground marks the overlapping roller blades as the focal point. Demand is established by the largest area of color. As Jay Lemke (1998) reminds us, in “all semiotic constructions, the visual qualities of an element mean in relation to those of other elements, especially those in the same presentation” (p. 108). Thus, it is important to analyze the other elements. The distance of proximity of other elements, such as the tree, birds, horizon, and clouds, mark them as of less significance. An important attribute of the background is the use of balance, where there are two clouds, one either side of the title, a tree and bush, again, either side of the central object (roller blades), and evenly spaced birds. They offer balance around the centered object and suggest life through movement (flying birds). These organizational choices, which hint at a three dimensional overlap (evident by birds of various sizes), require viewers to coordinate two visual spaces in a single space of representation. This image was situated within an open air environment.

Significant within Emma and Thomas’ text is the attempt to integrate written, visual, spatial, and gestural text on this title page. The title is placed in the top center position, but interestingly does not take precedence due to the demand of the focal visual, the roller blades. Even though part of the title is written in capital letters, the visual of the roller blades still dominates. The title reads “The New and Old Roller Blades”, but there is slippage between the title and the visual as the visual only displays the newer version. It is the level of specificity that matters here. Something is missing and this is something we would redress in future lessons with these students.

Significance of Literacy Design Analysis

The research presented here is significant in three ways. First, it details how hybridized genres, such as a multimodal timeline, create new challenges for the students. These excerpts show the meaning three pairs of students created through integrating text to produce a timeline that incorporated written, visual, spatial, and gestural design. Generally speaking, the students have attempted to shorten the written text and communicate important information. Students also have employed a variety of grammatical styles for written, visual, gestural, and spatial text formation. The analyses rendered visible the need to sensitize students to other ways of representing written, visual, spatial, and gestural meaning. We would now recommend that overt instruction brings to consciousness a focus on the interrelationship of visual, written, spatial, and gestural text.

The second point of significance is how this research promotes the notion that acquiring literacy in SOSE is not just a matter of acquiring content knowledge alone. The corollary of this point is that demonstrations of subject area knowledge are inextricably linked to demonstrations of appropriate grammatical forms of the written, visual, spatial, and gestural text design. These analyses demonstrate that the teaching of literacies should not be confined to one curriculum area (such as subject English), but should interface with bodies of knowledge in all areas of discipline as an integral part of effective learning.

Finally, the preceding analyses are significant for the way they demonstrate the utility of systemic functional linguistics for analysing students’ multimodal text construction in SOSE. The theory enabled us to make visible the foci for proceeding phases of overt instruction. The analyses of multimodal text are complex, but the effort enables powerful and useful analyses of language, a rich account of meaning, and a way forward for teacher instruction.
References

Print-based


Web-based


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