The "Architect" in Antonin Raymond's Way of Thinking
A Definition Based on Antonin Raymond's Own Words

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Abstract

This paper presents the result of a study based on a selection of writings produced by Antonin Raymond in Japan and America between 1935 and 1964, which are considered by the author as the best expression of the architect's way of thinking. This study is part of a larger research on the residential architecture designed by Antonin Raymond in pre Second World War Japan. The research explores more particularly the idea of 'synthesis' in Raymond's architecture, a synthesis between western principles of modern architecture and Japanese principles of design and conception of space. The present paper aims to present the result of a study on the definition of "the Architect" based on Antonin Raymond's way of thinking, and to show that the architect himself is a man of synthesis. It also provides the opportunity to present a series of writings which have not yet been thoroughly analyzed, nor published in English. Through the selection of a number of keywords contained in the texts, we were able to distinguish three themes, which embody the core characteristics of the "Architect" in Antonin Raymond's way of thinking. They are embodied in the three words artist, engineer, and guide.

Keywords: Antonin Raymond; architect; architectural discourse

1. Introduction

1.1 Antonin Raymond's writings in context

The date of the first document studied (1935) coincides with a peak stage of Antonin Raymond's first 15 years practice in Japan. By 1935, the Czech born architect had designed and built his most significant works of pre-war modern residential architecture in the country, which included his own houses in Tokyo (1924), and Karuizawa (1933). Raymond had also secured a well established reputation as a modern architect in the country. This is testified by a large number of publications in Japanese and foreign architectural magazines. The culmination of this period also resulted in the publishing of two books of works. In parallel to his intensive practice, Antonin Raymond developed his ideas on architecture, and more particularly on modern architecture and the crucial consideration that should be given to Japanese traditional conception of space and building. By 1935, he had reached a sufficient level of achievement, which, added to his experience of Japanese culture and architecture, allowed him to take part in the architectural debate by expressing his way of thinking not only on the drawing board, but also in writing.

His return to the United-States at the break out of the Second World War prompted him to share his experience as an architect in Japan and to make a statement regarding the position and the duties of the architect in the development of modern architecture: "During the eighteen years that I stayed in Japan I often longed to find myself again amongst people of my profession to whom I could try to convey some of the ideas which moved me during my stay there and which I subsequently tried to express in my life's work." (See Raymond, 1938).

1.2 Aim of the paper

Considering the fact that Antonin Raymond's architecture is recognised in Japan but that little is known about his way of thinking, the aim of this paper is to give an insight into the architect's architectural statement through the study of a selected number of his writings. These writings are devoted to the subject of modern architecture. The study has enabled us to distinguish two sub-themes from which the topic of this paper was chosen.

The first of these sub-themes is the study of the "fundamental principles" behind Japanese architecture. A. Raymond considers that the "goal of modern architecture" is the "rediscovery" of these fundamental principles (see Raymond, 1935). The other theme is the "Architect", in terms of status and duty in general and in the context of Japan. The architect is at the centre of the various fields that interact in the process of architecture. He is a man of synthesis, and the key actor in society through which the development of architecture is made possible. As Christian Norberg Schulz explains:

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“[...] one of his main tasks is to formulate problems on the basis of the various and often contradictory needs which are brought forth.” (See Norberg Schulz, 1965).

1.3 Nature of the source documents

The series of essays chosen for the purpose of our study consists of 17 texts written by Antonin Raymond in the form of lectures and speeches which were given in Japan and America, at Universities and Architectural Associations. The first reason for which these essays were chosen is because they are clearly aimed at the transmission of the architect's way of thinking. The second reason is because these documents have not yet been the subject of any thorough study in English or Japanese, although some of the selected writings have been translated in Japanese. (See Raymond, 1967).

Antonin Raymond also produced other kinds of documents. These include the two books of architectural works published in Japan towards the end of his first stay. The first book (see Raymond, 1936) presented a series of projects realized between 1920 and 1935. The second book (see Raymond, 1938) presented details of various projects through drawings and pictures. Then there are a number of articles and "letters to the editor" published in America or Japan through general magazines such as Pencil Points, This is Japan and architectural magazines such as Architectural Review, Kenchiku Bunka or Shinkenchiku. Lastly, Antonin Raymond published his own autobiography, first in Japanese (see Raymond, 1970) and then in English (see Raymond, 1973).

1.4 Methodology

The approach chosen for the analysis of Antonin Raymond's writings consisted of two phases. The first phase consisted in surveying the text in order to select keywords or expressions representative of the architect's ideas on the concept of "architect". These are words or expressions which appear repeatedly in the text and are of obvious importance.

The second phase consisted in gathering different words which refer to similar areas of the subject, therefore forming themes. Through this process, three main themes have emerged from the selected essays. The following figure illustrates the above mentioned process, showing examples of selected keywords and the three themes which have consequently been determined as the core of Antonin Raymond's definition of what is an architect:

![Diagram of themes]

Fig.1. Determination of the Themes Constituting the Core of A. Raymond's Definition of the "Architect"

2. The Architect is an Artist

2.1 Antonin Raymond and art

The idea of considering the architect as an artist appears throughout Antonin Raymond's writings. Indeed, his immediate environment always provided him with a direct contact with art, from an early stage in his life. It is important to mention that he was himself a skilled painter. In 1914, before the beginning of WW1, Antonin Raymond spent a few months in Italy where he fully dedicated himself to painting.

![Antonin Raymond in his Studio in Anticoli Corrado (Italy), 1914]

Later, while working at Taliesin with Frank Lloyd Wright, he also had the opportunity to be introduced to Japanese art, of which the American master was a great collector. During his stay in Italy, Antonin Raymond had also befriended Harvey Wetzel, assistant curator of the Boston Museum of Art which had one of the most important collections of Oriental art at the time. Lastly, his wife Noémi Pernissen was herself an artist and designer, and she collaborated with her husband on a great number of projects.

2.2 The architect and the artist

In Antonin Raymond's writings, the definition of the artist is the following:

"Whether a man is a real artist or not is determined by whether he has an ability to express through his work the relationship between men and the universe.” (See Raymond, 1953).

During the first years of his stay in Japan, Raymond endeavoured to study and understand the principles at the base of Japanese architecture, which fascinated him as soon as he had set foot in Yokohama, on New Year's Eve, 1919. One of the main aspects of Japanese architecture that he quickly grasped was its connection with nature, expressed through the use of natural materials, often unadulterated, and through the conception of space.

It is in the expression of this connection between man and Nature, where Nature is considered as a symbol of the greater universe, that Raymond establishes the common purpose and position of the architect and the artist:

"Whenever the artist is at work, be it in music, poetry, painting, sculpture or architecture, he comes..."
face to face with the laws of Nature, which keep order in the Universe." (See Raymond, 1949).

In the context of architecture, this relationship between men and the universe takes form through the expression of what Antonin Raymond calls "a spiritual idea" (See Raymond, 1949):

"The man is happy when he is in contact with the Universe, God and nature that surround him and feels them close to himself. An architect is an artist who builds a structure which gives men such happiness when they are in it." (See Raymond, 1953).

The architect and the artist, however, do not only meet on the grounds of a common purpose of expression. They also share an attitude towards society:

"Amongst the free men, the creative artist is the truly free agent. He alone in nature is the creator and his virtue and duty is, one might say, the perfect use of freedom, that is to create beauty." (See Raymond, 1949).

Raymond further states:

"A real architect must be an independent artist. He must have freedom and strength to stick to his principles." (See Raymond, 1953).

For Antonin Raymond, independence and freedom are vital to the architect and the artist in order to protect them from anything which might compromise their creative work. In this particular essay, Antonin Raymond is referring to the context of architectural practice in Japan at the time. Architects were then very dependant on contractors, who acted as intermediates between them and the client. As he testifies, these contractors:

"[were] not interested in anything other than pleasing their customers and making money." (See Raymond, 1949).

2.3 The expression of beauty
In Antonin Raymond's way of thinking:

"Mere functionalism is not sufficient to create great architecture." (See Raymond, 1940), and he further states that:

"It is the architect's job to create beauty in every house, no matter what the economic level is." (See Raymond, 1945).

This statement echoes his conception of beauty in architecture, as it is expressed through art or poetry, or any creative activity connected to the expression of the connection between man and the Universe. This connection is based on the rules which govern the Universe and which Raymond qualifies as "absolute values":

"It is this search for absolute values and absolute truths, as revealed in the creations of an artist, that constitutes the artistic creation's worthiness and real beauty." (See Raymond, 1949).

These values are opposite to what he names "relative values", in the following terms:

"Sensual and material satisfactions are, what I call, relative values." (See Raymond, 1949).

For Raymond, traditional Japanese houses offered the best example of this expression. In his view, true beauty was to be found in the:

Simplicity and inimitable poetry of the Japanese room." (See Raymond, 1935).

At this point, it is necessary to indicate that Antonin Raymond's discourse on art and the concept of beauty in architecture is not only the consequence of his encounter with Japan. It is also strongly related to his battle against the old establishment of the French Ecole des Beaux-Arts, which at the time was still setting the aesthetic standards in mainstream art and architecture. This institution represented all the ideas against which Antonin Raymond and other defenders of modern art and architecture were fighting, whether it be in Europe, in America or in Japan. This establishment promoted what he refers to as:

"The styles and the straight jackets of beauty that had made life so easy and had safeguarded mediocrity over many centuries." (See Raymond, 1946).

This statement refers to the later half of the 19th century, during which the majority of architects continued to design according to past aesthetic standards, regardless of the changes in society's life style. Antonin Raymond fought against this state of affairs throughout his career. He refers to this problem in the following words:

"Just think of the colossal failure [...] of all those designers that did and do get all their knowledge and inspiration from copying empty forms and colors and textures and proportions of the cadavers of past expressions, instead of creating from their own palette." (See Raymond, 1949).

2.4 The achievement of beauty

After defining the relationship between the architect and beauty, we are now able to point out in Antonin Raymond's writings, the means through which the architect can achieve beauty in architecture. First, Antonin Raymond reminds us that:

"Beauty of form grows out of motivation and purpose." (See Raymond, 1940).

This refers to the 'spiritual idea', or 'purpose' that should be the base of every design. Naturally, this purpose also includes a functionalist dimension. However, function can never be the sole purpose of architecture. Function can only: "figure alongside the spiritual idea" (See Raymond, 1949). According to A. Raymond, the "spiritual idea" can only result in beauty under the following condition:

"Beauty will result only when the designer is a creative artist, and has a powerful aesthetic conception." (See Raymond, 1940).

Regarding the work of architecture, this therefore means that beyond functionalism:

"The architect still has the larger part of his work before him in converting sensible architecture into beautiful architecture." (See Raymond, 1940).

Antonin Raymond witnessed such an achievement
of beauty in the context of Japan. It is from the observation of the Japanese house that he understood how beauty could be attained in architectural design:

"It is through increased simplicity and elimination that the man of taste finds elegance." (See Raymond, 1935).

That is not to say that beauty can be achieved by mere economy of means, or considered:

"[...] as a luxury item to be left on or off depending on cost." (See Raymond, 1945).

Nor should it be aimed as such by the architect:

"We should not aim for beauty, but deal with realities and from the inside out, and if we can confine ourselves to this only, beauty will come as a reward." (See Raymond, 1938).

Indeed, any attempt to achieve beauty solely as a means to satisfying ones personal taste is bound to fail. As we have mentioned earlier, it is most important to give priority to a clear purpose or idea behind the design. Antonin Raymond says:

"A design cannot be beautiful, without such message, no matter what form, color or workmanship it has." (See Raymond, 1949).

3. The Architect is an Engineer

3.1 The relationship between the architect and the engineer

In his early writings, Raymond emphasizes the vital aspect of a close collaboration between the architect and the engineer, stating that they must:

"[...] work hand in hand [...] from the beginning (of the project), in order to find not an extraordinary solution, but the simplest, the most direct and most economical solution of the problem." (See Raymond, 1938).

However, in his endeavor to achieve such an aim, Raymond soon realized that the architect needed more than a simple collaboration with the engineer. In fact, the architect had to become one himself:

"The aim of the architect is to plant once more his feet on the ground, to work naturally and from inside, to avoid outside artistic and abstract influences, to become once more an "Architect" which means "Master-Builder." (See Raymond, 1938).

This realization was enhanced by the context of Japan, where the architect in the western sense did not traditionally exist, and the carpenter played the role of architect and engineer at the same time. It became clear to A. Raymond that architects should master construction as well as conception of space in order to achieve their aim:

"[...] unless the architect wakes up and fulfills once again the role of the master builder, he will disappear from the scheme of things in the modern world and be relegated to play the role of a picture maker and a crank on historical or even modern styles and fashions." (See Raymond, 1938).

He further states:

"To obtain unity of design, they must rely on themselves." (See Raymond, 1940).

The rise of Antonin Raymond's concern regarding the capacity of the architect in the technical field coincides with the period of transition during which on one hand industry was undergoing major changes, resulting in the availability of new materials and techniques in the field of building, while on the other hand, the majority of architects was mainly concerned with ornamentation and decoration. This later resulted in what he describes as follows:

"Designers, whether they are architects or designers for the industry, have, as a rule, little idea how their designs are to be executed." (See Raymond, 1940).

Raymond applied this concern to the organization of the architectural office, stating that:

"In a real architect's office there are no such employees as draftsmen. They are all architects and engineers." (See Raymond, 1962).

He applied this principle to his own office in Tokyo, before and after World War II, often recruiting young Japanese architects who had studied abroad:

"[...] I had architects and carpenters, carpenter estimators, construction engineers and mechanical engineers right in my office." (See Raymond, 1938).

From Raymond's point of view, only an office organised in this way would give birth to what he called "true architects":

"The most hopeful architects in Japan "are those who have acquired the benefits of modern scientific engineering and Western architectural education, who are conscious of the rich treasure of their own tradition." (See Raymond, 1953).

3.2 A key to freedom

Antonin Raymond, as we have seen, considers freedom as one of the main needs of the architect. While the artist side of the architect provides him with the aesthetic culture and the desire for beauty, the engineer has a larger part to play in the fulfilment of the need for freedom. This freedom aims at liberating the constraints imposed on him by the contractor and the establishment representative of old styles.

The development of industry, particularly in America, provided the architect and engineer with what the architect refers to as:

"The process of liberation and rediscovery." (See Raymond, 1938).

One of these developments concerned the steel industry, in which he saw a means to create a clear break with the past:

"Steel brought with it new concepts of structural stability and extreme emotional instability for the hapless guardians of architecture." (See Raymond, 1946).

Antonin Raymond is here once again referring to the representatives of the old establishment with
whom he is eager to create a clear break. For him, the development of the steel industry had a direct impact on the quest for freedom and its expression in architecture:

"Space is infinitely flexible. No longer are you doomed to reside in cubes and rectangles, no tradition regulates door heights nor determines corridors." (See Raymond, 1940).

According to Raymond, another means of fulfilling freedom through developments in the industrial realm is standardization:

"To my way of thinking, standardization is a tool to free the architect for a more economical use of his capacities." (See Raymond, 1945).

Standardization is the key to:

"[...] the need for a continual simplification of parts and procedures, for relating all products and processes to each other and to the specific requirements that they are intended to fulfill, and of improving overall design in relation to these developments and to changing patterns of life." (See Raymond, 1945).

These words show the importance of the part played by the engineer in the achievement of the goal of modern architecture, that is, to provide the most direct and simple solutions to the problems that challenge the architect in modern society:

"In what way does modern architecture meet all these ways of our modern life? Freedom – you can find it portrayed in the span of our bridges, the sweep of our roads, in the wealth of material which we have never known and with which we are experimenting daily." (See Raymond, 1940).

3.3 The tools of the architect-engineer

Antonin Raymond studied at the Prague Polytechnic, which means that he was initiated to engineering very early in the course of his architectural education. The importance of education was further emphasized by his master Frank Lloyd Wright. Later, the discovery of Japanese architecture convinced him that architects should be educated to value the vital role of the connection between the architect and engineering:

"The architect has to have a thorough schooling in building itself. It is only through building that he can learn how to design." [...] "It is only because of [a] direct contact [with building] that he can become worthy of the name of "Architect" i.e. the "Master Builder." (See Raymond, 1938).

By receiving a thorough education in engineering, the architect is not only free, but also able to use the tools that are provided to him by industry in order to create beautiful and economical architecture. In his way of thinking, this is achieved by a simple and clear use of these tools:

"The simpler the means of expressing a real idea in design, the stronger the expression becomes, the more powerful, the more true and therefore beautiful." (See Raymond, 1949).

"We must know the aesthetic meaning of the different materials besides their structural qualities." (See Raymond, 1938).

Throughout his career, Raymond wrote about his observations of the Japanese house, which provided a perfect illustration of this principle:

"Structural beauty is best shown in Japanese structure" (See Raymond, 1953) "A column is a column, a beam is a beam, undisguised and unornamented, but doing its work perfectly." (See Raymond, 1938).

Antonin Raymond was also fascinated by the Japanese shrine, particularly that of Ise, which in his opinion represented the epitome of the way construction should serve the purpose, or the spiritual idea behind the design:

"There we see exemplified not only the most direct and simple solution to a problem aimed at by architects today, but also construction used as an aesthetic element which is of course architecture in its purest form." (See Raymond, 1940).

It is upon these observations that he gradually formulated his own set of principles regarding modern architecture:

"In modern architecture, construction is the only decoration." (See Raymond, 1940).

These principles are not only a source of inspiration for Raymond, but also a link with the past. The Czech born architect was a great admirer of the architects of the Gothic period, and he felt a timeless connection between them and modern architects who would be able to grasp and use Japanese principles of design in the name of modern architecture:

"The real architects of all ages expressed beauty by structure itself." (See Raymond, 1953).

Beauty of structure may be achieved through the use of many materials at hand, on the condition that they themselves reflect the importance of nature in the principles of a modern architect:

"An architect's palette should be of infinite richness, it should be very close to the richness of nature." (See Raymond, 1949) [...] "We see beauty in natural wood, in well worked metals. We again feel their quality, their meaning in the universe." (See Raymond, 1940) [...] "All materials used for genuine Japanese architecture are used as they are, they are not covered with mortar or paint." (See Raymond, 1953).

Antonin Raymond's first statement of this idea was embodied in his project for his own residence in Tokyo in 1923, which was the first example of a raw concrete finish residence in Japan. In the following extract, he explains the qualities of this material:

"The reason for natural finished concrete are both practical and aesthetic. Permanent surfaces (are) integral with structural (ones), or even better, part of the structural element. [...] From the aesthetic point of view, the following everlasting principles always
govern my work. Naturalness is more beautiful than artificiality. Simplicity and clarity are more beautiful than wastefulness both of spaces and materials and all those aesthetic qualities must stem from the functions of the structure both practical and aesthetical." (See Raymond, 1961).

4. The Architect is a Guide

4.1 Writing and purpose

The very nature of the selected writings, being mainly in the form of lectures and speeches, conveys the idea that Antonin Raymond was animated by a strong need and will to express and communicate his way of thinking about modern architecture. In fact, observing the selected essays in the light of architecturology (See Boudon, 1992) allows us to consider that Raymond's writings are of a doctrinal nature. This means that his discourse aims above all at serving the architect's own ideas as well as convincing other members of the profession and the general public of their value and validity. The following excerpt illustrates the strong kind of tone and rhetoric that Raymond sometimes used to address architects in order to convey his ideas. This particular speech was made in front of an audience of architects in the context of post-war America:

"[...] my intention is to sweep you off your feet, to make the fact of modern architecture so true and so desirable, that those of you who are sold on it already will pursue it with renewed fervor; that these for whom it is still questionable will unreservedly make the vow of taking up the new [...] and joining the army of young soul(s) who are today marching forward in greater and greater numbers along the road toward direct, simple, creative architecture.[...] Your importance is enormous. Your power is deadly: and it is just that power that I want to turn to the destruction of the old and the embracing of the new, so that we may all work for creation." (See Raymond, 1940).

In the introduction to his essays, Raymond also testified of his need to convey his thought and experience in the following terms:

"The selected articles and lectures are concerned mostly with my struggle to clarify the basis and aims of contemporary design." (See Raymond, 1935).

And further:

"My life and that of my wife was directed since 1920 towards introducing Japanese design philosophy of all arts but principally of architecture to the outside world and teaching the Japanese architects Western architecture based on the principles of earliest Japanese design philosophy." (See Raymond, undated).

4.2 Guidance towards architects

Antonin Raymond's writings reveal his concern for two main fields of action within which the architect can play the role of a guide. The first field is that of education. For A. Raymond, it is particularly important to reestablish a lost contact between the architect and the knowledge of construction, or in other words between the architect and the engineer:

"Another step in re-establishing the solidity under the feet of the architect is to revise radically the architectural education in our colleges and universities. [...] to make the engineering of all kinds pertaining to the art of building the basis of their education just as engineering is the basis of all building." (See Raymond, 1938).

The second field of action is the professional environment of the architect. This may take place in the office, as we have seen earlier, where Antonin Raymond himself endeavored to transmit his knowledge and conception of space and building. It may also take place during meetings and assemblies of architectural associations, for which an important number of Raymond's texts were in fact written.

In the case of Antonin Raymond, this type of guidance mainly took place in America, where he regularly addressed an audience of American architects with whom he shared his experience of Japan. This experience made him see the problems of American architecture in the post war period more clearly, and during his speeches, he endeavored to give his point of view on them. In a speech on the role of architects in regards to the housing problems of post-war America, he addresses the architects in the following terms:

"I think the architect today is shirking his responsibility if he turns his back on this problem and directs his efforts solely to the luxury category of building." (See Raymond, 1945).

In Raymond's opinion, the American architect also lacked independence and strength of character, mainly due to his obsession with material success, which sometimes resulted in the architect being dominated by the client, an idea that Raymond resented:

"The architect still anxiously surveys the likes and dislikes of his client. [...] The architect should have the courage and authority [...]." (See Raymond, 1938).

4.3 Guidance towards society

Antonin Raymond was passionate about his profession, and he did not forget that the architect has a responsibility towards society at large as well. Yet he also believed that society and the architect should work hand in hand to achieve progress:

"The architects should be guides and initiators in creating a better and better environment for living. [...] In order to achieve this, they should lure the populace to elect cultured and unselfish legislators instead of the politicians, lawyers, etc. which form the majority in legislative bodies." (See Raymond, 1960).

In these words, he emphasised the idea that while the architect's effort should be directed towards creativity, society has a more political role to play.

Raymond was also critical of American society. After returning from Japan, he felt particularly ill at ease with what he felt as a very materialistic society, particularly when it came to aesthetic considerations.
and the definition of the concept of beauty:

"They begin with a preconception of what is beautiful rather than with fundamentals and allow beauty to arrive of its own accord." (See Raymond, 1938).

On the other hand, the architect praised Japanese society, because its context had allowed him to experiment thoroughly upon the principles of modern architecture:

"The desire of the Japanese public for a modern environment made it easier for me to create with a freedom in which I was aided by lessons learned from ancient Japanese architecture. Today, the general public with the sense of newly found freedom is willing and even anxious to accept what goes under the name of modern architecture [...]" (See Raymond, 1967).

Indeed, Antonin Raymond's relationship with Japan and his Japanese clients in fact played a great part in the development and promotion of the idea according to which the architect is an artist:

"I found that Japanese clients, almost as a rule, have respect for the opinion of the artist, be he a painter, a sculptor, an architect, a musician, or a writer and that is why the clients choose and employ him. I often wonder, when I deal with Western clients, about their lack of judgment in thinking that an artist is just a tool and that a client's own likes and dislikes will result in something of permanent value." (See Raymond, 1962).

5. Conclusion

The study of Antonin Raymond's writings has revealed that the architect is at the centre of his architectural discourse. In other words, to talk about architecture is to talk about the "architect". Raymond writes about the "Architect" with a capital "A" which refers to his idea of a "universal" definition of the concept of "architect". This idea is also embodied in the term "true architect".

The qualities of the "true architect" should enable him to respond to the permanent and unchangeable needs of all human beings for dwelling and beauty. In Antonin Raymond's way of thinking, it is essential that a modern architect has these qualities in order to achieve his task. The architect's duty is to find "the most direct and simple solution" to the problems presented to him by society, in the creation of beauty, and in the achievement of an economical architecture.

The present paper aimed to show that according to Antonin Raymond's way of thinking, the architect can perform his task if he has the three qualities of an artist, an engineer and a guide. Based on this study of the three "faces" of the architect it is possible to say that beyond the functional purpose, the 'artist' side of the architect provides him with an aesthetic purpose, while the 'engineer' side of the architect provides him with the means to achieve this purpose. Finally, the 'guide' side of the architect is the one through which he shows that he is politically conscious and interacts with society, including other architects.

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