

Introduction

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M*osaic* 56.2 is a general issue. It opens with Yanbin Kang's wonderful essay on the poetry of Emily Dickinson. Dickinson's poetry is enough to make anyone feel happy, fulfilled, and at peace with the universe. We find out why in Kang's essay, "Dickinson's Dew, Concentrated Casualness, and Emersonian Dao." With special attention to the influence of Emerson and a few of Dickinson's singular subjects of attention, poems to a flower, dew, the spider, a pebble, the robin, and jay each unfold as a union with nature that Kang would have us entertain through an Asian aesthetics of no-mind and self-emptying. The author shows us how this poetics is materialized in Dickinson's often scrappy, loose-leaf manuscript pages and offers visual pairings with Chinese painting. These examples not only solidify the parallels between cultures but instance a kind of realism or close observation of nature able to plumb a differential analytic of biological species despite the anthropomorphic characterizations attached.

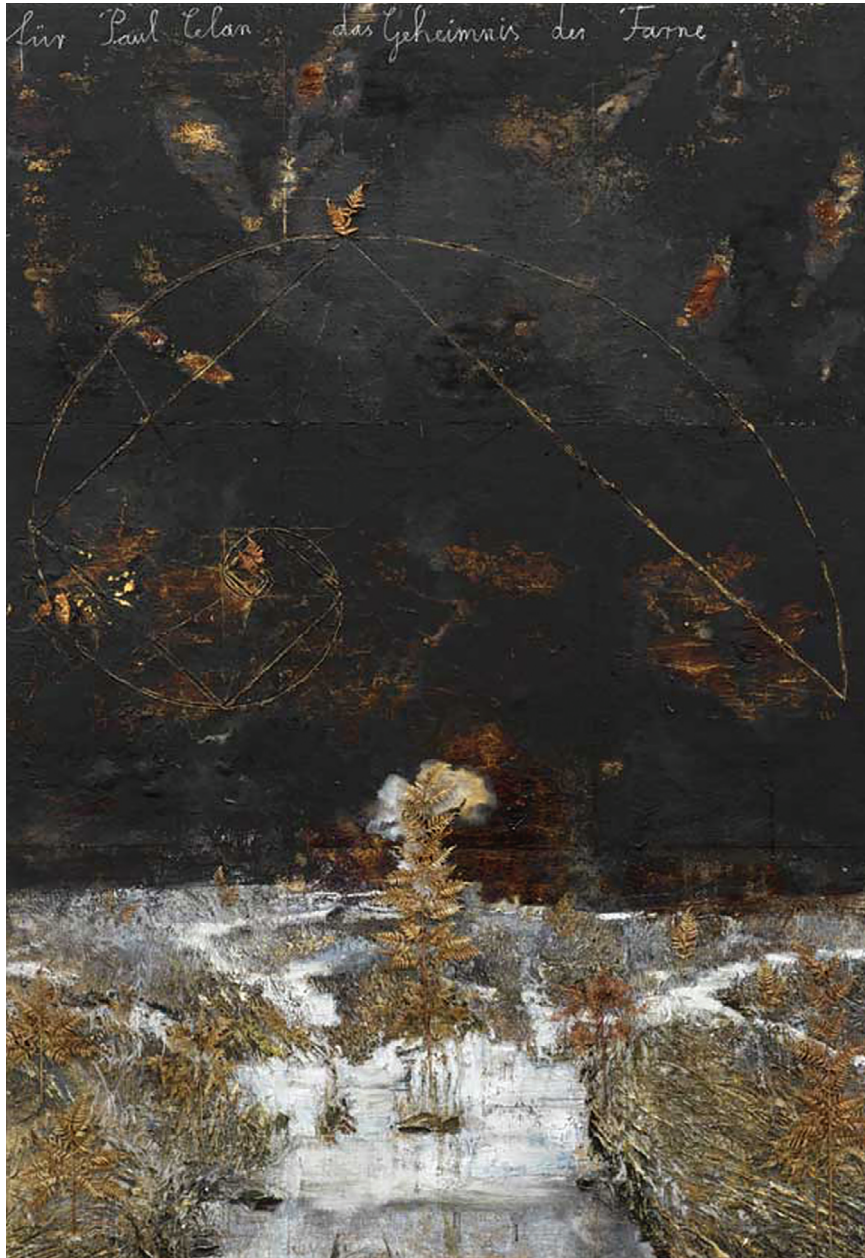
In Feng Dong's "Dark Inoculation: Death and the Uncanny in Celan's Later Poetry," we are introduced to a few of the key tropes that appear in the cryptic late works of Paul Celan. The whiteness of "cosmic snow," "glacial meadows," crystals, chalk, and the "breathlessness of thinking" provide the crucial signposts. With an emphasis on the paradoxical links between organic life and an inorganic world, each

is assigned a historical face and in each case these associations turn away from us in so many apotropaic acts. It is with Dong's essay on Celan's late poetry in mind that *Mosaic* features the work of Anselm Kiefer.

"Power, Responsibility, and the Stranger in Michael Ondaatje's *The Cat's Table*" by Mike Marais focuses on the figure of the stranger as a cipher for both the exercise of power and the possibility of an ethics in service to the other. Ultimately, the contradiction and disparity between these two forms of relationality are plumbed as a resource for thinking a notion of precarity that can only be isolated through close reading, and which the author argues must lay below the threshold of visibility. In "Popular Genres and the Disnarrated in Lemony Snicket's *A Series of Unfortunate Events*," Maryam Khorasani and Susan Poursanati study poietic questions in the well-known children's book by Daniel Handler. The authors' focus on the disnarrated or cliched paths identified but not taken in the book are understood as both poetic devices to move narrative beyond the well-worn circuitry of the genre of children's literature and as aids to self-reflection intended to animate a critical consciousness of generic expectations. This is the *bildungsroman* redefined: fortified with the vitamins and minerals typically added to breakfast cereal but here that can be tasted and hence exchanged for comic relief. Hence also, an expanded self that leaves a former self buried, behind, and not so knowing.

In Silvia Kurr's "Beyond the Body: Ekprastic Embodiment and Material Agency in Ciaran Carson's *Still Life*," the author explores the limits of meaning and the thresholds of matter in Carson's highly intertextual writing. The horizon of mortality and entry to a non-human world is constantly staged through the power of things, whose agency is typically denied. Thus, Kurr's emphasis on autobiography, genre painting, the medium of art criticism, the vitality of a pencil, music, the infirmity of a body, and the experience of chemotherapy. In "The Translator: A Shadow in the (Author's) Cave of Ideas," Olivera Kusovac brings the discipline of translation studies to bear on the figure of the translator in J.C. Somoza's novel *The Athenian Murders*. With recourse to the labyrinthine plot, the author makes sense of the book's complex metafiction through the metaphor of the book as cave, the translator as both outside and inside the novel, and the endless process of differentiating fact from fiction.

Finally, in "The Disappearance of Musical Futures?: Multiple Temporalities and Sonic Anachronisms in 'New' Music," Guglielmo Bottin analyzes the broken promise of contemporary electronic music. The author sees futurity substituted for historical pasts in a broad symptomatology ranging from digital distribution platforms, sampling, and the blurring of lines between live and recorded music, to the vogue for obsolescent playback technologies, techno, and Daft Punk's last album, *Random*



1. Anselm Kiefer. *Für Paul Celan – das Geheimnis der Farne* (For Paul Celan – The Secret of the Ferns). 2021. © Anselm Kiefer. Photo: Georges Poncet.



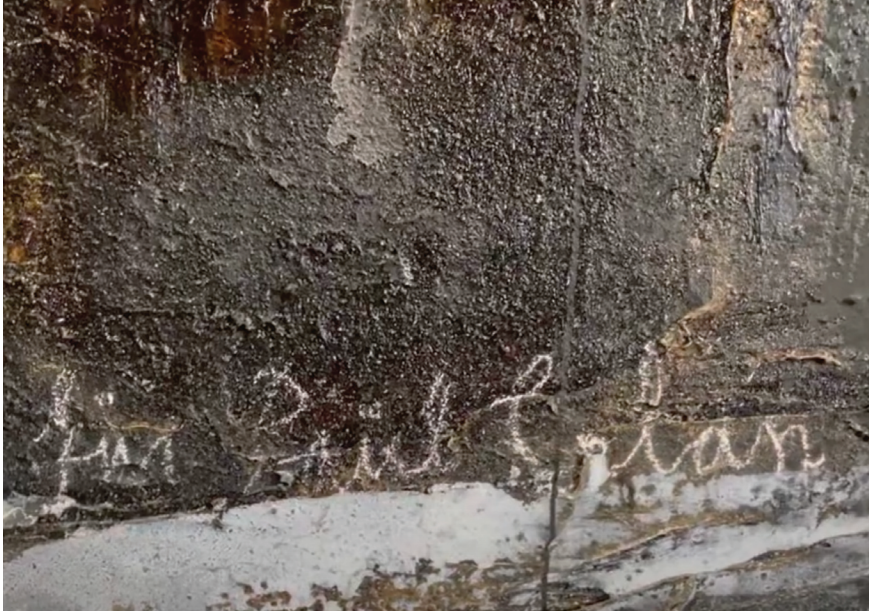
2. Anselm Kiefer. *Pour Paul Celan*. Grand Palais Éphémère, 2021. © Exhibition view, Photo: Georges Poncet.

Access Memories. As a special supplement to his essay, Bottin singles out a handful of albums that hold onto the promise of what is to come in “Six Popular Music Albums as Allegories of the Future.”

On the cover we feature Anselm Kiefer’s *Für Paul Celan—das Geheimnis der Farne* (2021). The artist has been in close dialogue with the poetry of Paul Celan since the 1960s, and the phrase “Für Paul Celan” appears on a number of Kiefer’s recent “paintings.” Scare quotes are a necessity here, for these paintings are far too large and heavy a thing to be hung on a wall. Mounted on rollers in part to simply move them, factories, storage facilities, and aircraft hangers are the only spaces large enough to show them. The scale is staggering as they are paintings as much as sculptural edifices. Amidst the scorched fields, dead sunflowers, and vast night skies that are a leitmotif of so many of the artist’s apocalyptic landscapes, the phrase provides a kind of small comfort for the eye. From the perspective of the beholder, “Für Paul Celan” reads as a poetic element, a quick gloss or something to hold onto that is necessarily cut and



3. Anselm Kiefer. AUF DER KLIPPE – für Paul Celan. 2019-2021. © Anselm Kiefer. Photo: Georges Poncet.



4. Anselm Kiefer. *AUF DER KLIPPE – für Paul Celan*. 2019–2021. Detail of inscription. © Anselm Kiefer. Photo: Georges Poncet.

separated from a far more hellish context. It is the detail as fetish, a case of selective inattention, the motivation of which is precisely to avoid the anxiety, which Kiefer's surfaces inevitably provoke. Text and image are always in a fraught relationship in Kiefer's work whether one looks from a distance or from up close. The viewer who does not scan Kiefer's surfaces for this phrase or others will be a rarity. One sees it high overhead as in the example of *Für Paul Celan—das Geheimnis der Farne*, barely visible on a rough surface, partially covered beneath a tarry flow, always written in white chalk, attached to other phrases, like smoke rising from a flame, as an *hors champ* condition, and so on.

At Kiefer's exhibition at the Grand Palais, Éphémère in Paris (2021–22), this dedication was the show title itself. In the example of *Auf der Klippe—für Paul Celan* (2019–21) it appears just beneath eye level on an enormous wall of a canvas. In the case of *Für Paul Celan—das Geheimnis der Farne* (2021), the phrase comes attached to the title of one of Celan's poems and is written at the top edge of a nearly 28-foot-high panel. In the former, it is shaky, at the threshold of visibility; in the latter, crooked, oversized, roughly written as if the artist were writing on tippy toes. The phrase comes off as much as a final gesture to complete the work after the fact as an



5. Detail of inscription. Anselm Kiefer. *Für Paul Celan – das Geheimnis der Farne* (For Paul Celan – The Secret of the Ferns). 2021. © Anselm Kiefer. Photo: Georges Poncet.

act of remembering the origin of the massive material thing that painting here is. Like the poet's surname, changed to an anagram of Ancel (originally Antschel), "Für Paul Celan" can come first or second, be an origin or an end, scrutinized, forgotten like a worm underfoot, or raised up in apotheosis. These are recurrent tropes in Kiefer's work, and they are an important reminder of the lessons learned by Kiefer from Celan. As Werner Hamacher frames these forms of reversal with regard to the poet: "Scarcely any figure in his early and middle lyrics asserts itself with such open urgency as the figure of inversion" (281). For Hamacher, these inversions and the "inversion of inversion" point to a fundamental tension between language and reality, something as central to Kiefer's art as Celan's poetry (281). What the critic calls the "ornamental gleam" of language that tethers it to the world is taken away despite sign or form, and name, word, or image (281).

In *Für Paul Celan—das Geheimnis der Farne* the dry chalky writing dances on top of materials like emulsion, oil, shellac, burnt substrate, and resin that equally coalesce as a night sky with a sort of connect the dots constellation between stars. All of this feels the pull of gravity and float high above the crude realism of a landscape lying far below. A tall, centrally placed, and very real looking fern made from a molding process, and a surrounding heath of shorter ferns, some trampled down by paths covered in snow, rendered through a mix of pictorial means and molded substances, furnishes the ground. Other fronds float up or fall to earth. As with many of the artist's works around the turn of the millennium when the horizon slips earthward,



6. Detail of inscription. Anselm Kiefer. *Für Paul Celan – das Geheimnis der Farne* (For Paul Celan – The Secret of the Ferns). 2021. © Anselm Kiefer. Photo: Georges Poncet.



7. Anselm Kiefer. *Mohn und Gedächtnis* (*Poppy and Memory*). 2019-2020. La Ribaute, Barjac, France.

the mise-en-scène with vault above is so vast, viscerally felt, and variously peppered with fronds that it swallows one whole, and we cannot help being absorbed into the scenography in such a way that we only really begin to look—as strange as this sounds—when in the work. This does not happen in the artist's far heavier earlier works from the 1980s-90s, where we simply confront a surface of brute matter, which is pitted against figural and illusionistic resources, neither of which has the upper hand. The embodied experience of being in Kiefer's paintings from the last five years is categorically different. Think especially of Kiefer's many self-portraits lying supine, perhaps sleeping or dreaming in a field at night, or his repeated act of assuming this position in Wim Wender's revealing documentary on the artist, *Anselm* (2023), for we do the same. They are *Gegenlicht*, to quote the title of one of Celan's early publications. We look up from the ground provided to the spatial expanse of the heavens above, to the cryptic geometry inscribed in that dark sky, and ultimately to the inscription, *Für Paul Celan—das Geheimnis der Farne*, at the uppermost edge. The attentive viewer needn't lean on Kiefer to know that at this or other moments of focal attention, the text stabilizes a range of wildly unstable relationships between above and below, past and future, or up and down (338, 391). Reducing the work to this

linguistic fragment alone goes against the “grossly impure material,” which is one of his as much as one of Celan’s great subjects. In Celan’s poetry, graspable meaning is a fugitive affair, and its very infrequency as an event is indissociable from periods of utter incomprehension, each of which rub off on the other, both troubling meaning made and furthering movement into the unknown in turn. Thus “*Todesfuge*” or “Death Fugue,” Celan’s best known poem on the horror of the death camps and a work which first galvanized Kiefer’s obsession with the poet. At La Ribaute, the viewer encounters one of many works that the artist has dedicated to *Mohn und Gedächtnis* (1952), the title of Celan’s first book of poetry that contains “*Todesfuge*.”

Kiefer is representative of a post war generation of German artists who have tried very hard to come to terms with German history, especially the events surrounding World War II, the Nazis, and the Holocaust. His early paintings, photographs, and sculptures all instance a version of symptomatic critique that hits very close to home. If these works gain a footing in troubled soil, and his later works take a global perspective on the patterns of history, technology, and warfare that lead one civilization to be eclipsed and forgotten by the next, his loose suite of paintings dedicated to Paul Celan return to a set of core concerns from a new perspective. This is not unrelated to the Romanian born naturalized French identity of Celan, for Kiefer made his Celan paintings in his most recent studio outside of Paris. Like that of his first studio in a former brick factory in Büchen, Germany, this working context in the environs of Paris where Celan himself lived is important for thinking the appearance of the phrase “*Für Paul Celan*.” For Kiefer, the viewer “open” to “sound,” which is “spatial” and not focussed (391), divides the textual fragment into a readable or digestible form and an hors champ condition. This in turn telescopes lessons the artist learned from working both above and below ground in his La Ribaute studio complex situated on the site of a former nineteenth-century textile factory in the hilly landscape of the Cévennes. Second, the industrial method born of these factory-studios multiplies the echo.

But again, neither the horizontality of landscape nor the question of industrial reproduction can be privileged or hypostatized. Kiefer’s scorched earth policy that is literalized in his technique of painting that employs flammable liquids and a blow torch or his adoption of molten lead as if to mirror heavy industry is not the crux of Kiefer’s works for Paul Celan. The crucial problem resides within and beyond these technical questions and is only furtively registered in the process of making these works which begin on the flat and are finished on the vertical. So unlike painting that classically operates on the horizontal play of glances, which is a relational or interpersonal dynamic animated by eyesight, and shot-through by power, Kiefer’s monumental paintings turn on an axis that shuttles instead between heaven and earth. In his

1960 Meridian Lecture for the Georg Büchner Prize in Literature, Celan frames the problem of orientation thusly: “This means stepping out of what is human, betaking oneself to a realm that is uncanny yet turned toward what’s human—the same realm where the monkey, the robots and thereby [...] alas art too seems to be at home” (Celan, *Selected* 404-05). In *Für Paul Celan—das Geheimnis der Farne*, Kiefer reminds us that ferns are of this uncanny realm as well, and that *The Secret of the Ferns* is not the dream of a botanist alone. Certainly, we project ourselves into the scenography of the work and are given a different kind of vision, precisely not Van Gogh’s sight of a turnsole that follows the sun which is such an important precursor for Kiefer, but that of a fern whose orientation mirrors the stars of the night sky, a vegetal realm that is distinct from yet also the home of what Celan describes as the human, the monkey, technical objects, and art.

In Kiefer’s interviews from the 1990s and early 2000s, his thoughts often circled around poetry, esoteric thought, and cabbalistic teachings. The “dark light” offered by these visions of a symbolic universe were antithetical to a dominant anthropocentric world view. Then and there Van Gogh’s mythic treatment of sunflowers intermingled with the mystic teaching of Robert Flood, who Kiefer suggests “established a precise relation between stars and plants.” Today there is more distance built into his relationship with these cosmologies than there was at the turn of the millennium. But even back then he acknowledged that “irony [was] indispensable,” stating rather bluntly: “The idea [...] is very pretty. It’s an explanation that works for me, for my *dasein*. It’s a consolation. [...] I distrust belief, and all dogma. They are nothing but ways of gaining power, of exciting chauvinism” (“This” 294). In this regard, it seems crucial to point out that *Für Paul Celan—das Geheimnis der Farne* is not merely a painting modelled on Celan’s poetry, but an existential reality built on Celan’s unique poem, the pictorial interpretation of which has by no means gotten to the bottom of things. In a kind of act that ventriloquizes Adorno’s inversion of Hegel’s dictum “*Das Wahre ist das Ganze*—the whole is the true,” on this point Kiefer reiterates one of the great but sobering aphorisms of *Minima Moralia*: “The splinter in your eye is the best magnifying glass” (50).

I do not think Adorno’s worries about the totalizing drive of philosophy were lost to Kiefer in his exhibition *Für Paul Celan* at the Grand Palais, Éphémère, either. “Estranged form,” as Adorno calls the splinter itself, was everywhere present and moreover singled out in a brief text (15). “Celan’s language comes from so far away,” Kiefer writes, “from another world with which we have not yet been confronted, it reaches us like that of an extraterrestrial. [...] We catch fragments of it here and there. We cling to it without ever being able to grasp it as a whole. I have tried, humbly for



8. Anselm Kiefer. *Samson (crypt)*. 2003-2005. La Ribaute, Barjac, France. © Anselm Kiefer. Photo: Charles Duprat.

sixty years. Now I am writing this language on canvas, an endeavour that requires the same devotion as a rite” (*Guide Visite*). The secreting away of ritual time and ritual space is what to remember here. For Kiefer this happens at specific locations, with specific time stamps attached, vis-à-vis specific texts and as the endlessness of the interpretative encounter. Thus, Germano Celant calls La Ribaute’s concrete towers, maze of subterranean passages, purpose-built pavilions, connecting tunnels, and the huge warehouse-like space in which *Für Paul Celan—das Geheimnis der Farne* is presently located “the vital extension of the painted” (46). And equally, Wenders, who finds the key entrance to Kiefer’s work to be time and duration shaped into a metaphor of the filmic apparatus and experience. Of course, the poetic sequences of Kiefer sleeping, riding a bike, checking previous works, doing the rounds of his enormous studio in Croissy, reading, painting, doing another loop, and dreaming should not blind us to Kiefer’s own secrets that are folded away within what seems an endless working life, where past and future blur, spaces co-mingle, and motifs from long ago are recycled. Kiefer’s perambulations in *Anselm* speak to movements internal to *Für Paul Celan—das Geheimnis der Farne* and variously repeated thereafter as encounters with the work. The towering height of the painting links it to the *Himmelspaläste* outside, and to the stars above in the actual night sky. The caster wheels that allow the



9. Anselm Kiefer. *Mesopotamia*. 2007-2020. La Ribaute, Barjac, France. © Anselm Kiefer. Photo: Georges Poncet.

work to be moved around the studio into proximity with a shifting constellation of other works, or beyond the studio into the orbit of other spaces, gesture to a mirroric structure that corresponds to celestial movements high above.

The “measureless power” (Melville 313) at Kiefer’s fingertips in his former studio at La Ribaute begs comparison with Herman Melville’s description from *Moby Dick* of “that wild whaling life where individual notabilities make up all totalities” (312). But of course, there is a crucial difference. For if the paintings themselves are fanatic monuments to the self, they are at one and the same time an equally fanatical undermining of that entity. Self-importance bleeds off into the figure of a poetic precursor. The edifices built in the artist’s name and under his direction spill out into the world. The art of painting, little less than the rectangular frame of painting, no longer possesses the requisite finitude that an architecture open to the wind and rain, the assaults of time, or meddling by its maker is subject to. Existential crises constantly tower over the works Kiefer has installed at La Ribaute, and the same goes for those works named for Paul Celan, like *Asche für Paul Celan* (2006), *Auf der Klippe—für Paul Celan*, and *Für Paul Celan—das Geheimnis der Farne*. In a kind of prose poem that is as much an ode “to an ever-sinking world,” Kiefer writes, “If you lift something



10. Anselm Kiefer. *Die Himmelspaläste* (*The Heavenly Palaces*). 2003–2018. La Ribaute, Barjac, France. © Anselm Kiefer. Photo: Charles Duprat.

from the ground, then from the very moment it has been lifted up, it is the same no more” (223). In the case of *Für Paul Celan—das Geheimnis der Farne*, what remains among other ruins is Celan’s poem and, perhaps, life reimagined. Though we must remember in readying the poem that Celan’s figures of inversion are without “ornamental gleam.” Thus, the poet tells us, “Don’t fool yourself: not even this last map gives off light anymore—the darkness round about has been absorbed into itself: (Celan qtd. in Hamacho 7.82).

Im Gewölbe der Schwerter besieht sich der Schatten
 laubgrünes Herz.
 Blank sind die Klingen: wer säumte im Tod nicht vor Spiegeln?
 Auch wird hier in Krügen kredenzt die lebendige Schwermut:
 blumig finstert sie hoch, eh sie trinken, als wär sie nicht Wasser,
 als wär sie ein Tausendschön hier, das befragt wird nach
 dunklerer Liebe,
 nach schwärzerem Pfühl für das Lager, nach schwererem
 Haar . . .

Hier aber wird nur gebangt um den Schimmer des Eisens,
 und leuchtet ein Ding hier noch auf, so sei es ein Schwert.
 Wir leeren den Krug nur vom Tisch, weil uns Spiegel bewirten:
 einer springe entzwei, wo wir grün sind wie Laub!

In Michael Hamburger's translation of Celan's *The Secret of the Ferns*:

In the vault of swords the leaf-green heart of the shadows looks
at itself.
The blades are bright: who would not linger in death before
mirrors?
Also in jugs here a sadness that's living is drunk to:
flowery it darkens up, before they drink, as though it were not
water,
as though here it were a daisy of which darker love is demanded,
a pillow more black for the couch, and heavier hair . . .

But here there is only dread for the shining of iron;
and if anything here still glints up, may it be a sword.
Were not mirrors our hosts, never we'd empty the jug from this
table:
let one of them crack and split where we're green as the leaves. (41)

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