

## “Moving” Society

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### Abstract

*Today Internet represents the realm of new ways and possibilities to access knowledge, to socialize, to work and so on, so that life seems to pass directly from the world of the net, in which one works, produces and from which relationships are born, especially among young people. The goal of this paper is to read the consequences of this phenomenon in today's society, precisely in “movement”, especially by focusing on the age group relating to adolescents.*

**Keywords:** Communication - Identity - Relationships

### 1. Communication and freedom between the ego and otherness

«Communication is at the center of every education»(Broccoli, 2008, 15), that is every reality of confrontation needs an altruistic perspective in order to create an effective moment of relationship. At least, it should provide for the absence of any strict closure and not available for the synthesis between one's own interpretations and those of others. As Scheler (2010, 232s) argues, «man lives “in the first place” more in others than in him/herself. More in the community than in his individual», unlike Buber (2004, 116), according to whom «the fundamental fact of human existence is man with man. What characterizes the world of humans in a peculiar way is above all the fact that here, between being and being, incurs something that has no equal in nature. Language serves only as a sign, as a medium, in this relationship and everything that is the work of the spirit owes its awakening to it. It makes man a man».

Even more clearly, Bauman outlined the appearance of man's full freedom condition when he becomes aware of himself in the relationship with the other, engaging in the creation of a true relationship (Milan, 1994, 32s). In fact, the principle of otherness, considered as the natural element of man in relation to the other man, has always been at the center of every system of thought(Aristotele, 2002, 255).

Natoli (2004, 137) includes in the concept of otherness the need *to take charge* of the other and his problems, instead reading negatively a lack of this responsibility in protecting the relationship of closeness to the others and caring them. It is the concept also known as caring: taking care of, having attention for. A thought born thanks to the intuitions of Don Lorenzo Milani (Fortino, 2016).

From this perspective the inevitable relationship between the self and the other explains the sense of social action of man during modernity age. The relationship between the ego and otherness represents an interesting reading key to perceive also the quality of communication interacting new ways at the time of contemporary society.

Broccoli (2008, 15), analyzing the caring idea in educational processes historical path, clarified how much the principle at the basis of each communication sphere («space and availability for commitment, responsible action, ethics») is to be understood absolutely bound to the relationship with the other. This is because, according to his thought, a concrete relationship can be achieved only through comparison modalities in the name of values such as listening, proximity, respect for humanity.

Rubini (2014, 82) affirming that «dialogue does not arise from the simple algebraic sum of two individualities, but from an authentic encounter which, with its implicit reference to otherness, calls into question the educational experience and lays the solid foundation for a philosophy of education that hinges on relationship and communication» as well as she intends to motivate the indispensable link between single and multiple identity, between the individual and alterity in creating a solid communication relationship. Nevertheless, it is a solidity that, due to the experiences of individual men based on their individual specificities, can also be imperfect and often lead to fractures and problems in attempts at interaction, dialogue and knowledge. We can add then an identity that is always in continuous formation and change.

In this regard, De Monticelli (2009, 367) maintains that an individual's personality can never be reduced to a fixed and stable uniqueness but, on the contrary, constantly updated. Just as, to use her phrasing, the whole of a person who is completely autonomous and unavailable for meetings that change his nature does not exist. On the contrary, there is an ever-new result, in which, however, man must always be considered responsible, in conscience, for his choices and actions.

A person, therefore, who assumes «in his free acts the responsibility for what he becomes» (De Monticelli, 2009, 186). In short, identity follows a path of growth in which training is constantly engaged in confronting and reaching a personal dimension precisely by virtue of these moments of relationship and, in a certain sense, disruption of the individual sphere. According to De Monticelli, consequently, there are no precise identity criteria, as they are only part of the whole and of a whole to be interpreted as a reality that is always in formation.

In the continuous race for a changing identity that is always in formation, there are, however, aspects of risk and of rejecting paradoxically these dimensions of encounter, with the consequence of an extreme closure in one's self. In this regard, Bauman (2012a, 87) pointed out that daily commitment to building an identity can lead to such critical situations, considering the «fluid world» in which contemporary man lives. According to him, «we are forced to twist and shape our identities without being able to remain firmly tied to one of them even if we wanted to» (Bauman, 2012a, 87). Furthermore, he underlines how this continuous renewal can also produce discomfort in the man of the third millennium, an individual who seems to live a reality of isolation (Bauman, 2012b, 115). In the current scenario of human relationships, which are also fluid and changeable, relationships experience basic ambiguities and ambivalences. This happens because in the relationship with the other the individual has his own price to pay: the sacrifice, to some extent, of his independence (Bauman, 2012a, 90).

Finally, human relationships lived today largely according to an approach mediated by IT and technological connections, require in some cases even exaggerated and pathological renewal of the personality, and even more of personal image, as a moment of exposure towards others. In this context, the personality changes and transforms itself, however following a path, sometimes virtual and on the surface.

Communication carried out only at appearance levels, therefore, can lead the individual, in this distorted mode of relationship between self and otherness, to see freedom compromised as a space for one's authentic personality expression and fulfillment. The pathological and questionable aspect of this dimension consists in the forced creation of an image aimed exclusively at promoting oneself, in a zone that seems to deny authenticity, so high is the desire to show oneself better than one is and above all than you would like to be. This is, undoubtedly, the result of a culture that is strongly narcissistic at the base (Cesareo&Vaccarini, 2012; Riva, 2016).

Cantelmi (2013, 154s) spoke of digital narcissuses, resorting to the definition of the civilization of images for our time, characterized by great use of the production of tools useful for self-exposure. In this sense, the images are considered by him not as an expression of positivity and progress because of their narcotic character. This disproportionate cult of images, as mentioned, must be inserted in the current communicative and sociological reality, often based precisely on what appears, rather than what it really is. «This phenomenon is linked to the culture of visibility that privileges visual experience over other types of knowledge», says Cantelmi (2013, 154). In this vision, the person even assumes the guise of an «increasingly attractive commodity», while adapting to fashion, discarding «what, from time to time, appears to be out of date» (Cantelmi, 2013, 148).

## **2. Identity and otherness: relationships or distances?**

The fluidity of the society formulated and illustrated by Bauman, later defined “techno-liquid” by Cantelmi (2013, 149), therefore, the identity is not fixed, but changing. It even appears fragile, exposed to changes. If everything is variable, identity is thus forced to outline new «architectures», to emerge from its narrow shell, to build different forms of itself. In this context, everything appears fluid and «reversible» and therefore the boundaries of the ego take on different contours from time to time depending on the situations and contexts. An Ego constantly at the mercy of the novelties offered by the same relationships in which he is involved. These relationships bind the individual conscience to the obligatory reformulation of its boundaries in a space where, however, it is possible to wonder if real bonds arise or rather distances are created.

Identity is so conceivable «alongside another identity», a concept defined as «relational identity», that is, the creation of a personal development fully aware its necessary expansion towards the inevitable encounter with the other. An aspect that arises and is contextualized especially during adolescence, through first interpersonal and then group relationships. According to Cantelmi (2013, 166), «these are the years in which the human being prepares to assume within meaningful relationships a position of reciprocity, sharing, responsibility and autonomy, leaving the previous condition of passive reception of parental care». It is the moment of the creation of an increasingly related identity: on the one hand it is pushed to protect the autonomy of conscience, on the other hand it is linked to the world of relationships themselves that affect existence and the educational process.

Heidegger underlines the fundamental principle of «being with», a useful resource to face the crisis of relationality that leads individuals to feel increasingly frustrated, without understanding the reason for this inner mortification. He refers to a sort of «anguish» of contemporary man in the face of his inability to know how to establish relationships. Therefore, the techno-liquid society, as defined by Cantelmi, appears increasingly characterized by two aspects: alienation and lack of self-awareness. Alienation accompanies modern man, who on the one hand is the one and only protagonist of his life; on the other, it is invaded by profound loneliness and psychological malaise.

Consequently, it is certainly not difficult to sink into existential isolation, the degradation of consciousness and, precisely, alienation. For Heidegger, however, the individual must rediscover the urgency of *authentic life*, a need awakened by a sense of human anguish (Nesti, 2007, 79). An authentic life, in this sense, is therefore to be understood as a relationship life, whereby the anguish and discontent of modern man represent two emotions that allow to become aware of his own state and that Cantelmi (2013, 166ss) defines as *alarm bells*. Heidegger considers anxiety as the feeling that binds man to the awareness of finiteness, without thus having a negative or depressing value. The need to combat anguish and a sense of bewilderment, pushes the individual to conceive the urgency of living a reality and a society based on the relationship with the Other. An Other who assumes the guise now of the friend, now of the antagonist in our lives, however representing a necessary dimension in the perspective of comparison and reciprocity. An Other that limits our space and redefines the boundaries of our actions and therefore contributes to creating now approaches (relationships), now distances (distances).

The concept of otherotherness has inspired numerous other scholars and thinkers, including Lévinas (1984, 110), who identifies the dimension of alterity in the refusal of any closure by the individual, but above all in overcoming any dependence. He invokes the urgency of an open and available identity for the creation of one's own independent personality no longer subject to «parental care». An opening that is realized as a full capacity to give oneself to the other, a synthetic expression of the third phase in the journey Lévinas defines as «natural evolution of relational identity».

According to Lévinas (2018, 10), we can speak of an authentic relationship only when it appears to be based on a sort of «ethical primacy». In this vision, the concept of care recalls again the relationships, leaving the context related to the less adult phase.

Ethics dutifully involves language as well, seen as a human space of dialogue, in which the relationship with the Other acts. Language in its expressions consequently cannot exist without the Other, because it clearly challenges or invokes it (Lévinas, 1982, 70). Language generates a relationship in which singularity no longer intervenes as an essential element and a sort of renunciation by the individual occurs. Therefore, language introduces a substantial novelty in the subject-object relationship: the presence and revelation of the Other. In this system that language acts and is constituted, as an element that needs a plurality (Lévinas, 1982, 72).

### **3. Not places and communicative spaces of postmodern society**

French anthropologist Augé critically analyzes spaces in contemporary society, giving them alternatively a positive as well as negative connotations, categorizing their symbolic and collective dimensions in their various facets. These are spaces in which the relationship between the self and the other also appears to be mediated by complex realities, often negatively. He refers principally to the great places of today's society, huge spaces in which we risk losing the quality and authenticity of relationships. He supports the existence of places and non-places, areas that are different from each other precisely in the characteristics of human relationships that can be experienced within them. He maintains that places and non-places «fit together, mutually interpenetrate, the possibility of non-place is never absent from any place»(Augé, 2005, 97). This means that the possible existence of non-place is never to be excluded and that, therefore, both the place and its opposite can intervene in the same reality. Consequently, the non-place, especially in contemporary society, appears to be constantly present or at least probable. According to Augé (2005), places would represent spaces characterized by well-defined relational identities, more precisely areas in which social relationships act as an important fulcrum. It is therefore defined as a place precisely because within it defined identities are created, a space in which individuals recognize each other and share a common history. Therefore, from a strictly anthropological point of view, the place represents an area in which the social ties and history of a given community appear clearly identified and recognizable.

It is possible to say that a sort of community and group identity is present and protected within a regulated, organized and often defended space by the members who make it up and are part of it. Essentially and practically, the place coincides with the concrete construction of a specific space, built and built up over time by men (or perhaps in the city, by citizens), who have created meeting territories.

If the place is differentiated and distinguished thanks to these premises, everything that is radically distant from the points around which a place is recognized will be evidently its opposite: that is, a non-place. Augé clarifies his concept, asserting that «if a place can be defined as full of identity, relational, historical, a space that cannot be defined as full of identity, relational or historical, will be defined a non-place» (Pacelli, Marchetti, 2007, 143). Unlike the place, the non-place anthropologically identifies consumption spaces, and is also related to free-time management, disordered and soulless spaces, as they have almost nothing to do with what should concern the relationship and therefore, they have been concretized by man completely apart from it. Augé (2005, 71) expressly characterizes these non-places in contemporary society, as areas very frequented by man, even sometimes en masse: a multifaceted mass without history in which it is difficult to recognize a well-established identity. All these spaces perform specific functions which, if anything, connect the individual with the place itself, establishing contacts almost more with inanimate realities or with things compared to people and human subjects, involved instead in the case of places, where the concept of the relationship is protected.

Augé's non-places become such not so much for their possible and intrinsic negative qualities, but for the attitude that distinguishes the action of man within them, which is led to almost completely canceling relations with the other. From this point of view, «there are no places or non-places in an absolute sense», albeit with some «limitations», since it is clear that «some form of social bond can emerge everywhere: young people who meet regularly in a shopping centre, for example, they can make it a meeting point and thus invent a place» (Augé, 2010).

Bauman (2002, 113) is also interested in places and non-places. He has observed that «the non-place is a space devoid of symbolic expressions of identity, relationships and history: such examples of “non-places” are airports, highways, anonymous rooms hotel, public transport». Non-places, however, decide and characterize our lives, they mark our lives, as spaces necessarily frequented and in any case, in a certain sense, or at least in appearance, lived. According to Bauman (2002, 113), in fact, never in the history of the world non-places have occupied so much space, contributing considerably to conditionate the quality of existences, collective rites, community moments and social spaces. In this regard, Bauman (2004, 188s) also refers to «anthropoemic spaces» and «anthropophagic spaces». They are two expressions coined by Lévi-Strauss, to differentiate spaces along with two attitudes consequently related to the sociability between men. Anthropoemic space creates an attitude of refusal and distance towards the other, with the aim of sending away, pushing away, rejecting, thus canceling sociality from the very foundation. Anthropophagic spaces, even more, materialize a dimension in which space cancels the individual, englobes and phagocytizes it, suppressing the principle of otherness, a fundamental component for making sociality authentically active.

Augé's non-places resemble the dimension of the anthropoemic space outlined by Lévi-Strauss, with the difference, however, that the former, albeit with difficulty, welcome the relationship with the other, seen however as inevitable, while the latter deny it at the root. Furthermore, the men who frequent non-places live a dangerously illusory and falsified reality. Even not feeling at all extraneous to the place territory perception may emerge in them, indeed experiencing the impression of being in an almost familiar context, as if they were at home, while assuming different attitudes than those maintained in the respective households. The illusion is total, since the actions performed by individuals in this type of reality, do not take on any meaning of concrete relationship: they are, in fact, constructed not in function of relationality and sociality, but independently of them.

Again Bauman (2002, 113ss), clarifying the characteristics of non-places, defines them as «places to which no meaning is attributed [...]. They are not forbidden places, but empty spaces, inaccessible because of their invisibility [...]. Empty are the places where we do not go in to and where the sight of another human being would make us feel vulnerable, uncomfortable and a little frightened».

Augé highlights that shopping centre is symbolically one of today's most famous and popular non-places, probably the perfect non-place of our time. With the development of urbanization and the means of mass communication, the link existing between the place and the social situation that you are experiencing undergoes a transformation whereby the street and the square take on the role of non-places, since there is no interpersonal relationship. The “non-place”, however, is a space in which people pass without creating relationships between them or telling a story like the traditional village. The “non-place” of the ATM or drinks machine is paradigmatic under this respect. The non-place characterizes most of the life of young people, as it favors a series of encounters with the other, in fact without taking into account gender bias and / or stereotypes, as there are no situational demands but only neutral prescriptions.

Relationships “designed” by these non-places do not allow you to reflect on your identity and that of the other is virtualized enough. Furthermore, the different distribution of non-places within the urban structure means that peripheral areas subjects reduced opportunities for personal self-fulfillment determines the creation of informal groups of young people, who meet in places without utilities of any kind. It follows, therefore, that young people weave increasingly poor social relationships, characterized by the simple being together, with consequent manifestation of unease, which can result in vandalism or even petty crime, if not use and abuse of alcohol and drugs (Farina, 2013).

The non-place in a sociological sense, in the physical space delineated by Augé in contemporary society, is interwoven with the non-place in the physical and socio-communicative sense of the Net. If we assume this analytic perspective “movement” is a characterizing and essential character of contemporary society, an ontologically “moving” society. Movement is obviously immanent to any society, social change is an unavoidable character of society, but in the contemporary one it characterizes its sociological essence. It is not just a matter of accelerating change. All societies have changed; their characters, structures, expectations, social identities have individually and collectively changed over time, but in the contemporary one the ontological element is in itself the movement as de-structuring force of the place in a sociological and anthropological sense and of the identity now elusive in the flow of transformation by a continuous reorganization of relationship. Fragmentation, and the multifaceted appearance of society, derives from its “lack of form”, lost in the “movement”. This is the deeper meaning of Baumann's reflection on the current liquidity of society and identity, and of Augé on the non-place.

We could therefore highlight the transition from changing society to “movement” as a society, a “moving” society. Even Augè finds it difficult to give a social-anthropological framework to social networks, a greater contemporary mirror of the movement as a society. In contemporary society physical space “non-places” appear on the scene. They, disarticulating the perfect coincidence between social disposition and social organization, are anthropologically configured as spaces of passage «in which there is no a priori symbolic link immediately decipherable between individuals who frequent them» and «in which it is not possible to read social relations or the symbols of collective identity and shared history» (Allegrì, 2018, 46; Augè, 2015). Augè (2014) on some occasions and interviews considers social networks to be the «quintessence of non-places. On Facebook - he says - it is not like in the traditional village, “in social networks it is the place that creates the relationship”». At other times, he wonders if social networks cannot be conceived as antitheses to “non-places”, as they create new types of relationships and identities (Allegrì, 2018, 46; Augè, 2015). It is clearly the “volatility”, the instability, the changeability, the continuous reorganization of these relationships and identities that make their anthropological and sociological setting difficult, even for Augè. Bolter and Grusin (1999, 179) consider the whole “cyberspace”, the socio-communicative space defined by the Network, a non-place according to Augè’s meaning. Starting from the criticism of those who consider it a parallel social reality, a place of escape from contemporary society or the physical world, they qualify it sociologically, anthropologically, and symbolically in Augè’s definition as a non-place. On the contrary, the common juxtaposition of real and virtual spaces as two distinct spheres should be overcome (Bolter & Grusin, 1999, 179). The fluidity of identity, deriving from the passage and movement from one sphere to another, albeit imbricate (Bolter & Grusin, 1999, 179), and the continuous reorganization of relationships, is the distinctive sign of contemporary society.

#### **4. Studies and research on non-places**

The foregoing is also reflected in the empirical data. For example, shopping centres, an emblematic non-place according to Augè, have been analyzed by Lazzari and JaconoQuarantino, in 2010, even if the survey regarded use of telematic communication tools among adolescents considering a sample of students from almost all high schools in the city of Bergamo in Italy (De Fiori et al., 2010, 171ss).

The study, conducted by them, has shown how shopping centres today represent important points of reference for teenagers, even more appreciated than the parish, previously reputed among the most traditionally and historically born places to favor, during the free or extracurricular time, the meeting and the interaction between the boys. Lazzari and JaconoQuarantino emphasize how, in our age, shopping malls although negatively labeled by most sociologists and anthropologists, in fact can also contain their own true socialization points, especially for the youth world. At least, they can be interpreted and perceived as areas in which young people, in addition to being standardized in an apparently empty frame of content, are then able to undertake more authentic encounters paths, at least between friends, groups. According to Lazzari and JaconoQuarantino, the more adult generational class probably has a «prejudice» in relation to the existence of large spaces such as today’s shopping centers, perhaps due to the fact that the younger ones, unlike them, accept these reality «natively», as places lived since childhood, something that now happens habitually also with IT and technological tools (De Fiori et al., 2010, 171ss).

To make a comparison with more recent data, the Istat Annual Report (the National Statistical Institute) of 2018 offers considerable indicators around the issues concerning youth choices regarding the preference of meeting and aggregation places. The Report focuses on all age clusters, thus representing a real guide of the choices of Italians with respect to the organization and management of their free time. For example, young people, especially at school or university age, meet frequently in specific places of study, especially during the week, while, Saturday evening or whole weekend (especially during the winter season) are reserved to leisure activities or related to entertainment and nightlife. The Istat Report says that «with friends you can see each other especially at home or at their home (69.8%), but also in public places such as bars, restaurants, pubs and breweries (50.9%). The share of people who meet in outdoor places such as squares, streets, parks and gardens are slightly lower (39.4%). The habit of meeting in shopping malls, gyms, discos and social centres or elderly centres is less widespread» (Rapporto Istat, 2018, 208). According to Istat, they are not chosen in themselves as places for socialization, if ever they can become this way beyond the will of individuals. These places (not only shopping centres, but also, as you can see, discos or gyms) represent, therefore, spaces frequented with a specific purpose by users, which is not the immediate human aggregation, rather the determined achievement of certain objectives (purchases in the case of shopping centres, dance and entertainment for discos, physical activity for gyms).

In relation to gender, the Istat 2018 Report shows that «the choice of meeting places is very differentiated according to gender. Among women, the tendency to meet friends at home or in others (77.1%) and in shopping centers (14.4%) is more widespread; men most often choose to meet in clubs (57.6%), in outdoor places (41.8%) and in sports centers (10.9%)» (Istat Annual Report, 2018, 209).

Young people meeting habits change and become more public with adulthood, abandoning almost all the home meetings between peers, perhaps often in the afternoon and due to study. Pubs, clubs, pizzerias, bars have always been the favorite places.

To know how friendships and human relationships are formed, how new acquaintances between individuals emerge, as well as which areas of human attendance favor the creation of such networks of relationships, it is worthy to note according to Istat Report (2018) that one in three people know friends in their neighborhood today (37.6%). It is above all adults who form relationships and friendships within the area of residence, unlike the younger ones, up to the indicative age of 24, who tend to weave these relationships also at school and university, as well as places where you can play sports (since it concerns 14% of boys between 11 and 19 years).

The relationship related to social networks deserves a separate discussion. They are nowadays so important for everyone's lives, considering the very high percentages of subscribers to these platforms. Yet, according to mentioned Istat data, mainly related to the segment of the youngest, social media are indicated, as the primary source of knowledge, only by 6.5% of girls aged between 14 and 19 years (Istat Annual Report, 2018, 207ss).

Interesting statistical surveys also come from other studies concerning the issue of the use of social networks as a tool for acquaintance and attendance-socialization by the youth public. This is the case of a research carried out, in 2016, by the Media and Communication Research Center (known as OssCom.), on behalf of the Corecom of Lombardy. This study has focused on the daily relationship of young people, pre-adolescents and teenagers, with social media and has aimed to analyze the tools to prevent riskier and pathological behaviors, together with the identification of strategies to combat any distortions. Over time, this research has been also extended to the Corecoms of other regions, with other universities such as, for example, that of Naples and Sapienza of Rome. It is worthy to note that children use the internet before they even have a smartphone in their hands and that the average age of those who have their own mobile phone is included in the 8-12 age group. Moreover, Italy is, among other European countries, the one with the highest average Internet access. A research of Aroldi, Mascheroni, and Vittadini in 2017 then showed how the use of social media mainly involves children of the pre-adolescent age group (11-14 years), a group considered more vulnerable than the others, since 86.5% of users among the 11 and 18-year-old has at least one active profile on social media, of which a large part (49.4%) has only one, while a third of them have several (31.3%).

The social networks with the most subscribers are: WhatsApp (37.3%), Facebook (36.5%) and Instagram (18.8%), although in effect the last cannot be considered as a social network, but as an app. According to these data, WhatsApp currently represents the most used system compared to the others, while Facebook appears to be slightly down. The research further analyzed several areas of the South of Italy (both internal areas and urban centers), emerging that, in these vast areas, the attendance in certain places for the meeting and interaction depend strongly on the peculiarities and territory related properties, especially e.g. on the presence or absence of recreational, entertainment or catering venues. Those who live in the South prefer to encounter in open areas, most likely also due to the notoriously mild climate. Cultural activities (cinema, theater, museums, trips), on the other hand, are characterized by a relatively lower frequency and involve only a specific part of the population of southern citizens. Another way of occupying one's free time with friends includes those activities that are usually defined as playful and recreational, namely video games, board games and so on, but also sports-related activities, both passively (by spectators) and active (by athletes) (Aroldi et al., 2017, 3ss).

Returning to the data of the Istat Annual Report 2018, the research has shown how age and different age groups entail different ways of spending free time with others: young people focus more on recreational-activities, while adults are much more likely to participate in events or activities that stimulate the common interest and, therefore, more oriented towards the value of sharing. This aspect is affected by the territory that grants different possibilities and spaces according to age and other needs, so it helps to build varied ways to establish relationships of friendship, conviviality and encounter (Istat Annual Report, 2018, 211).

Both the research proposed - both that relating to the city of Bergamo (2010) and that by Istat (Report 2018) - highlight how the sociological and anthropological categories of place or non-place, together with their respective theoretical and conceptual relevance to delineated "moving" society, must then also to be read in the various social contexts in which they act, directly involving the habits, uses and choices of the men of our time.

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