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ESDAPC (Escola Superior de Disseny i Arts Plàstiques de Catalunya) / UdG (Universitat de Girona)

dserra8@xtec.cat | http://kennethrusso.net

Dr. David Serra Navarro is a teacher, researcher and visual artist. He is currently the coordinator of the management and research area of ESDAPC (Escola Superior de Disseny i Arts Plàstiques de Catalunya) and associate professor of the Communication Department of the University of Girona (UdG).

His interest in interactive communication, social innovation and virtual worlds has led him to publish different articles in national and international journals, carry out collaborative workshops in institutions and a large number of academic communications in congresses. In parallel, through his alter ego Kenneth Russo, his artistic production is on the edge of irony, and seeks a critical interaction of the viewer through formats such as painting, video, installations, mobile applications or collaborative actions.

His work has been exhibited at Arts Santa Mònica (Barcelona), CCCB (Barcelona), Bòlit Center d'Art Contemporani (Girona), Museu de l'Empordà, University of Lapland (Rovaniemi), FIB Art (Benicàssim), Off-Arco (Madrid), Loop Festival, Espacio Enter (Canarias/Berlin) or the Godia Foundation (Barcelona).

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Abstract

The metaverse that Neal Stephenson conceptualized in Snow Crash is much the same as the one that has evolved in recent years to accommodate networked virtual platforms.

In anthropology these spaces are known as meta-places: a remix of information. Proposals like Second Life (SL), Fortnite or The Sims are already a name in the history of virtual universes, while worlds like The Sandbox, Decentraland or Axie exemplify contemporary decentralized organizations through their blockchain technology.

The following contribution of ethnographic graphic story, experiential captures of virtual non-places, wants to document processes of appearance and disappearance through the image. Meanings, symbolisms, self-referentialities, ephemeral landscapes, mimesis of realities, dystopias or info-communicational disfigurements are some of the realities that hide behind each virtual creation or virtual island.

Capturing these experiences in the first person over these years means approaching the logic and synergies of these meta-places. Specifically, the visual material shown is linked to the virtual world of Second Life. This metaverse constitutes one of the platforms most explored by the author, and currently retains its interaction design devised in 2003.
Possibly Second Life, and its virtual peripheries, have given life to the burbclaves (isolated sites) and their social niches that Stephenson described to us, but also to a way of understanding the world inside and outside the interface.
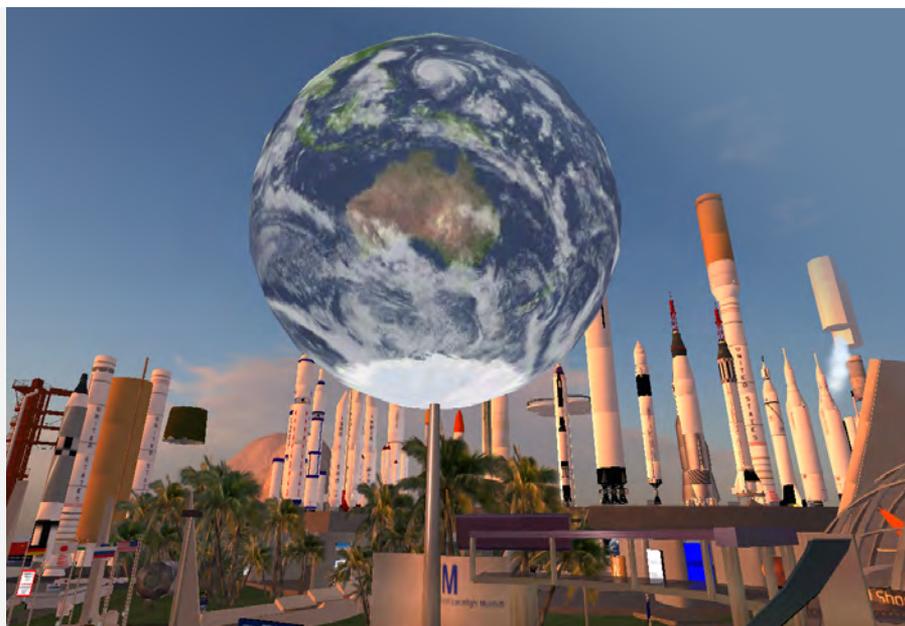
Keywords

metaverse
Second Life
media anthropology
meta-places
virtual world

Figure 1.
International Spaceflight Museum – Spaceport Alpha 01.
Author: russruss Kidd.

Snapshot [29/08/2012], Owner: Spaceflight Museum Planning Group; Claimed: Aug 21, 2007; Area: 55520 m2; Traffic: 453. Owner description: *Machinimatographers welcome. Contact Kat Lemieux for info. Rockets and spacecraft from the past, present and future. Ride a rocket into space and explore the planets! SciLands member. Volunteer created & maintained, donation supported. Not NASA.* Available at: http://maps.secondlife.com/secondlife/Spaceport%20 Alpha/124/152/23 (Accessed 29 August 2012).

The metaverse concept is not new. Neal Stephenson introduced this idea in his novel Snow Crash (1992), drawing inspiration from William Gibson's cyberspace: a parallel universe. Now this notion is becoming a reality that little by little is taking more relevance in our lives and our relationships mediated by interfaces. Although the popularity of this concept has currently been catapulted with the commercial commitment of Mark Zuckerberg opening augmented or virtual reality experiences, virtual worlds and massively multiplayer online role-playing game platforms have accompanied us on the Internet since some years. Perhaps two or three decades seem like a short time, but the time-experience relationship acquires another dimension in these virtual environments, the speed at which they are transformed can be dizzying from individual and collective experiences that crystallize in dynamic spaces. An environment where the image becomes the identity of its users and the small places contain visual memory and ephemeral interactions. The virtual is not opposed to the real, and the metaverses, characterized according to Edward Castronova (2001) by their persistence, corporeality and interaction, are a treasure of media anthropology in which to discover a varied production of meanings and critical sense. Throughout these years, curiosity about the possibilities of the metaverse and its evolution has led me to experiment in a unique virtual world: Second Life (SL). This virtual world developed by Linden Lab (2003) and created by Philip Rosedale as an evolution of his first proposal Linden World (1991) meant my immersion in a virtual artistic production lab, in which after many weeks living and coexisting with its avatars, I was led to carry out the Culdesac Island project. This artistic project, extensively documented and based on the collective exploration of cultural and critical activity in a virtual medium, had its maturity phase between 2010 and 2012. Once the economic resources to maintain it ran out, that is, when the contracted servers stopped working, it simply disappeared. Gone are all their avatars, all their prims, all their learning spaces, lol conversations, sandboxes, machinima sets, replicable poses, and gorgeous algorithms. For this reason, every time that even today I connect to SL, I am fascinated to see how new destinations are generated, to be able to remember interesting places struck down and to visit certain spaces that curiously persist to attract young avatars to deposit their experiences in the bitmaps that texture an imaginary changing collective. Each path that my virtual body makes on the chameleon map of the metaverse may be the last record that my memory retains; some fleeting images that create a substratum of values throughout my investigations.

I am interested in this reality perceived in fragments of symbolic polygons and documenting it as a media anthropology, like a reporter who watches the world around him fade away while waiting for the birth of another reality created by the synergies of the SL system and its users.

The purpose of these snapshots, a portfolio of virtual selfies, is to capture an instant of information, which brings us closer to a way of understanding space, of SL thinking, of a symbolic connection between the real world and the second life. A repertoire of unpublished images between the current sims and those of 15 years ago. The history of SL may not be understood without images, and its images are the reflection of the history of the producers of the SL metaverse.

Figure 2.
International Spaceflight Museum – Spaceport Alpha 02.
Author: russruss Kidd.

Snapshot [31/08/2022]; Owner: Spaceflight Museum Planning Group; Claimed: Aug 21, 2007; Area: 55520 m2; Traffic: 45. Available at: http://maps.secondlife.com/secondlife/ Spaceport%20Alpha/244/129/94 (Accessed 31 August 2022).

Figure 3.
Paris Couture – Paris 1900 01. Author: russruss Kidd.

Snapshot [30/08/2022]; Owner: Admicile-Grp; Claimed: Apr 03, 2014; Area: 30400 m2; Traffic: 100. Owner description: *France Paris 1900, designers, Ferris Wheel, haute couture, jazz, Machine galerie, artistes, french creator, Samaritaine, no sex, no nudity, attractions, Le louvre.* Available at: http://maps.secondlife.com/secondlife/Paris%20 Couture/40/184/22 (Accessed 30 August 2022).

Figure 4.
Avatar Performance – saut dans la vie.
Author: russruss Kidd.

Still frame [44'30"] Culdesac Island Documental: https://vimeo. com/kennethrusso/culdesac; SLplace: Paris Eiffel ~~ Paris 1900; Claimed: Apr 10. 2011; Owner: Admicile-Grp; Area: 59888 m2; Traffic: 604; Available at: http://maps.secondlife.com/secondlife/ Paris%20Eiffel/25/105/24 (Accessed 25 October 2012).

Figure 5a. London 1940 - the Blitz 01.
Author: russruss Kidd.

Snapshot [31/08/2022]; Owner: Time Portal Group; Claimed: Aug 23, 2014; Area: 9744 m2; Traffic: 45. Owner description: *Visit London in 1940, shop, dance, drink during the Blitz, when the sirens go, go underground. NO nazi stuff allowed, rp or otherwise. We ban on sight. 1940s war ww2 shopping club swing music vintage retro history 1940's london underground 1940s London.*
Available at: http://maps.secondlife.com/secondlife/Time%20Portal/33/77/3996 (Accessed 31 August 2022).

Figure 5b. London 1940 – the Blitz 02.
Author: russruss Kidd.

Snapshot [31/08/2022]; Owner: Time Portal Group; Claimed: Aug 23, 2014; Area: 9744 m2; Traffic: 45.
Available at: http://maps.secondlife.com/secondlife/Time%20Portal/33/77/3996 (Accessed 31 August 2022).
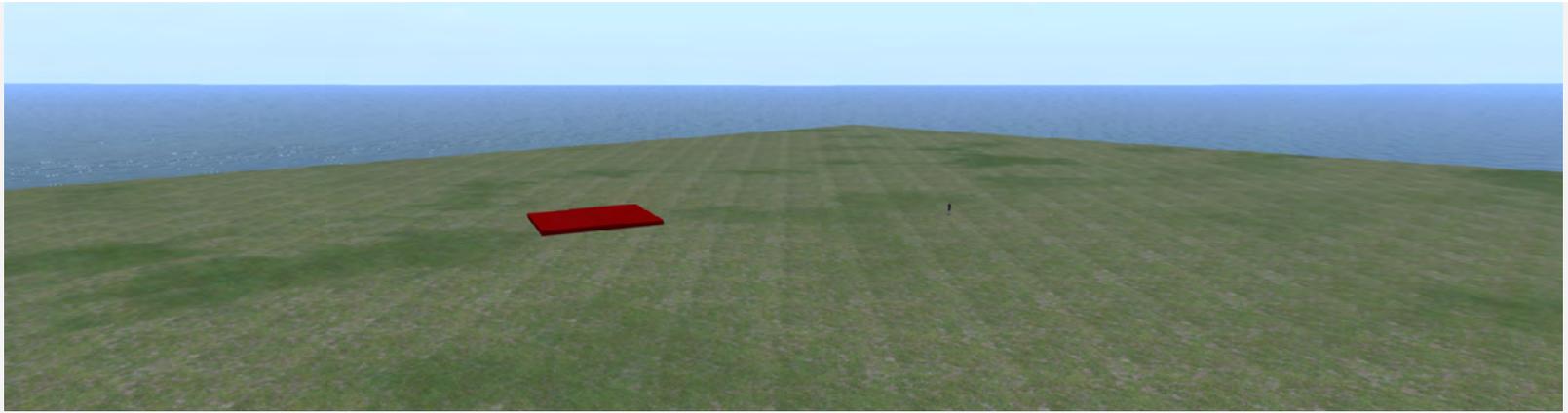
Figure 6a. Brooklyn Law School 01.
Author: russruss Kidd.

Snapshot [31/08/2022]; Owner: Brooklyn Law School group; Claimed: Oct 26, 2020; Area: 65536 m2; Traffic: 96; No owner description. Available at: http://maps.secondlife.com/secondlife/Brooklyn%20Law%20School/128/128/23 (Accessed 31 August 2022).

Figure 6b. Brooklyn Law School 02.
Author: russruss Kidd.

Snapshot [13/01/2023]; Owner: Brooklyn Law School group; Claimed: Oct 26, 2020; Area: 65536 m2; Traffic: 96. No owner description. Available at: http://maps.secondlife.com/secondlife/Brooklyn%20Law%20School/128/128/23 (Accessed 13 January 2023).
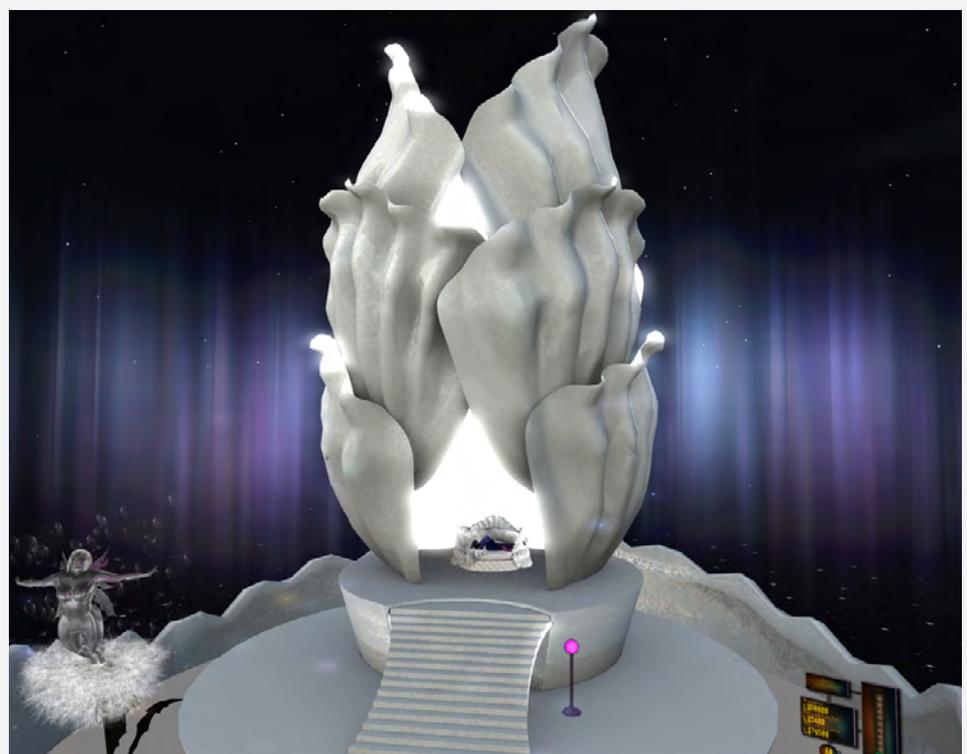
Figure 7.
Inspire Space Park 01.
Author: russruss Kidd.

Snapshot [13/01/2023]; Owner: Virtual Life Media group; Claimed: Mar 04, 2021; Area: 6848 m2; Traffic: 7047. Owner description: *Meditate in a cosmic sci-fi natural outer space galaxy built by talented SL artists. Blast off into the heavens, a universe of magic! Float amidst the stars & planets, listen to soothing ambient tunes. Af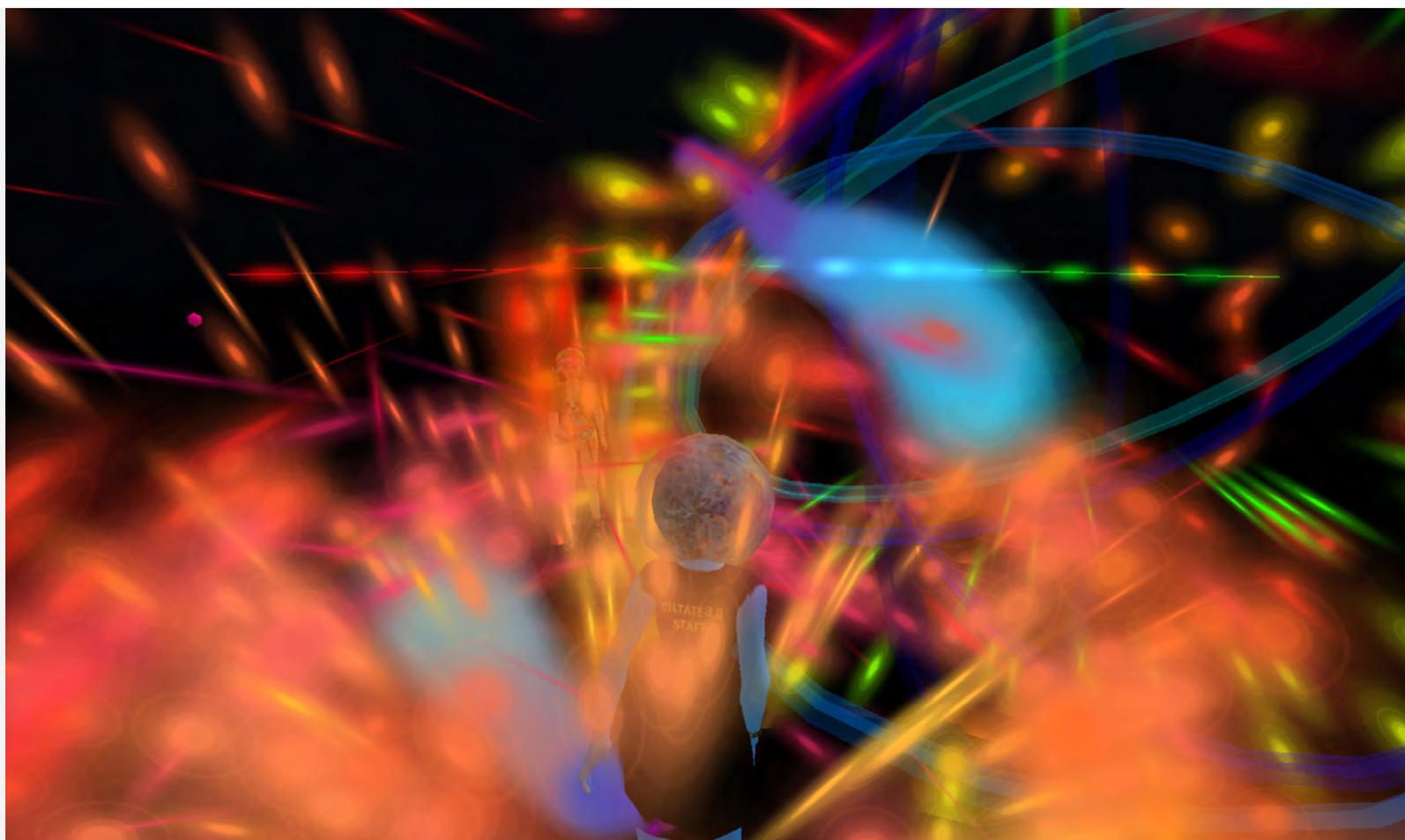fordable land rentals! Moon base homes too!* Available at: http://maps.secondlife.com/secondlife/ Shinda/111/179/3749 (Accessed 13 January 2023).

Figure 8a. Culdesac Island Sanbox event 01.
Author: russruss Kidd.

Snapshot [24/04/2010]; taken from the blog: https://kr2010.wordpress.com; disabled URL: http://slurl.com/secondlife/CULDESAC/194/204/21.

Figure 8b. Culdesac Island- Avatar tower 01.
Author: russruss Kidd.

Snapshot [25/05/2010]; taken from the blog: https://kr2010.wordpress.com; disabled URL: http://slurl.com/secondlife/CULDESAC/194/204/21 (Accessed 3 February 2010).

Figure 9. Gallery AI 01.
Author: russruss Kidd.

Snapshot [31/08/2022]; Owner: Danish Visions; Claimed: Feb 01 2011; Area: 4096 m2; Traffic: 100.
Owner description: *A place for art exhibitions and home of a contemporary art collection. In the grounds is a beautiful architectural exhibition building and an open air exhibition of art installations. Founder Betty Tureaud.* Available at: http://maps.secondlife.com/secondlife/Danish%20Visions/172/224/27 (Accessed 25 August 2022).

Figure 10. LGBTQ History Museum and Cultural Center 01.
Author: russruss Kidd.

Snapshot [31/08/2022]; Owner: Museum Land Group; Claimed: Aug 02, 2022; Area: 3440 m2; Traffic: 13;
Owner description: *The LGBTQ History Museum aims to be a creative and educational space for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender history and culture. We currently have a number of exhibits including: LGBT Activism, Influential People, and HIV/AIDS.* Available at: http://maps.secondlife.com/secondlife/Dalton/76/205/30 (Accessed 31 August 2022).

Figure 11. The Far Away, Dreamworld North 01.
Author: russruss Kidd.

Snapshot [30/08/2022]; Owner: The Far Away by AM Radio; Claimed: Apr 12, 2013; Area: 12288 m2; Traffic: 1760.
Owner description: *Wheat fields by AM Radio.*
Available at: http://maps.secondlife.com/secondlife/Dreamworld%20North/239/142/22 (Accessed 30 August 2022).

Figure 12. Rieri Town in Tokyo 01.
Author: russruss Kidd.

Snapshot [31/08/2022]; Owner: Eripom Moonwall; Claimed: Feb 14, 2008; Area: 32768 m2; Traffic: 388,
Owner description: *SSOC - Rieri Town in Tokyo, a realistic town, contemporary of Japan. /*Windlight Sky @ 900m to 1095m: "Midnight"*/.*
Available at: http://maps.secondlife.com/secondlife/SSOC/73/183/28 (Accessed 31 August 2022).

Figure 13. SL unknow market; snapshot [07/06/2012. Author: russruss Kidd.

Figure 14. Land of Fantasy, Carmine 01. Author: russruss Kidd.

Snapshot [13/01/2023]; Owner: Dee n Kay; Claimed: Mar 05, 2019; Area: 1024 m2; Traffic: 17. Owner description: *Just a relaxed place with a fantasy nature feel, Feel free to wander around.*
Available at: http://maps.secondlife.com/secondlife/Carmine/113/146/1607 (Accessed 13 January 2023).

Figure 15. Alphatribe 01.
Author: russruss Kidd.

Snapshot [13/01/2023]; Owner: Alpha Auer; Claimed: Jun 20, 2012; Area: 65520 m2; Traffic: 2879. Owner description: */*Windlight Sky: Sky @ 3000m to 3500m: "[TOR] BIG SUN - Impires" Sky @ 950m to 1050m: "Wastes_Midnight" */*.
Available at: http://maps.secondlife.com/secondlife/alphatribe/118/136/54 (Accessed 13 January 2023).

Figure 16. Tip Jars & Tip Boards 01.

Snapshot [30/08/2022]; Owner: Emerging Media group; Claimed: Jan 31, 2020; Area: 1952 m2; Traffic: 95; Owner description: *Tip Jars in Club & Personal models by .: Emerging Media :. Unique Mesh Tip jars. All feature multiple appearance & function options. Club tip jars add percent splits & employee log-in. Customizable Tip Boards with multiple button types. DJ tip jar.*
Available at: http://maps.secondlife.com/secondlife/Pandora/111/71/68 (Accessed 10 January 2023).

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