

FIRST CUT LAB

newsletter

An Italian Youth (2022)



&

DOCS

With the upcoming spring season full of international documentary film festivals such as **CPH:DOX**, **Cinémas du Réel**, **Visions du Réel** or **Hot Docs**, we're taking a closer look at what the First Cut Lab is doing for documentaries.

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ABOUT FIRST CUT LAB



First Cut Lab is a comprehensive training & consultancy programme supporting audiovisual professionals in Europe and worldwide, and their **feature films at the editing stage**. Created in 2015, First Cut Lab is run by Tatino Films – a company that also initiated the Full Circle Lab and the Pop Up Film Residency.

200 films from 50 countries have so far benefited from First Cut Lab. In 2020, we launched the First Cut+ programme to offer promotional & marketing consultancy to a portfolio of 16 films per year.

By providing a creative framework of exchanges that is simultaneously safe and challenging, First Cut Lab aims at **enhancing the artistic achievement** of the films, and at the same time at **fostering their potential of international circulation**. Participants receive expert advice from **editor consultants and industry advisors** chosen according to the specific needs of each film.

www.firstcutlab.eu



Katja Adomeit, Benjamin Mirguet & Giona A. Nazzaro during **First Cut Lab Ukraine**

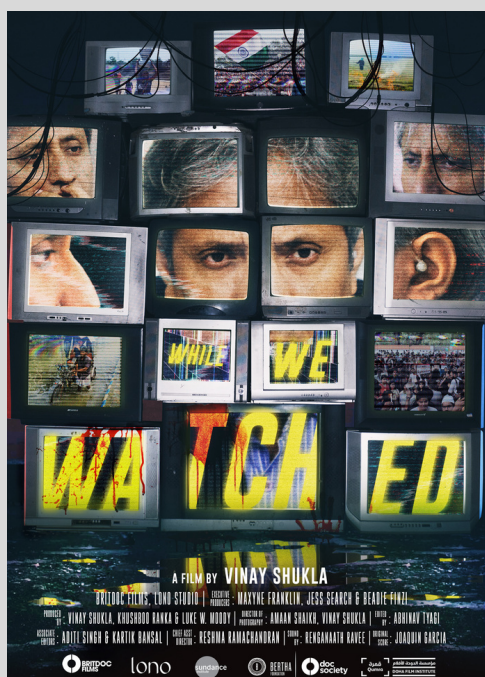
First Cut Lab was founded by its current director *Matthieu Darras*, together with *Alessandro Gropplero* and editor consultant *Benjamin Mirguet*. Julie Marnay works as program manager, whereas Naomi Levari and Wim Vanacker are involved as editorial consultants.

Regular editor consultants include Catalin Cristutiu, Jacques Comets, Agnieszka Glinska, Maya Maffioli, Sebastian Sepulveda, Matthieu Taponier, and Sebastian Winkels. Natalia Libet is in charge of First Cut+, working with a pool of promotion experts such as Michael Arnon, Christina Pelekani, or Joanna Solecka.

About **250 industry advisors** have provided feedbacks on rough cut materials, usually producers, sales agents, and festival representatives.

Some documentaries that took part in **First Cut Lab** in the past include:

While We Watched (Toronto & Busan 2022), *Hours of Ours* (Visions du Réel 2023), *Long Distance Swimmer - Sara Mardini* (Hot Docs 2023).

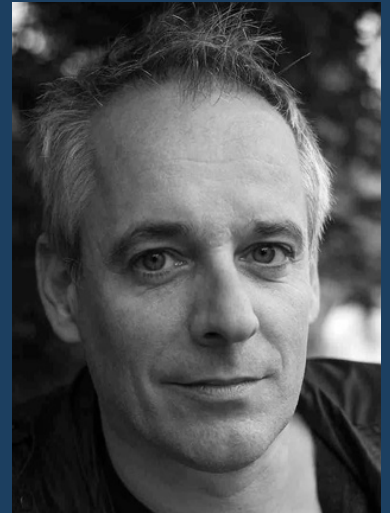


SEBASTIAN *Winkels*

First Cut Lab Editor Consultant

Sebastian Winkels is a director, editor and dramaturg of nonfictional films. He graduated at Film University Konrad Wolf Babelsberg and lives in Berlin. As a director he likes to explore confined communication spaces and an idea of participatory storytelling.

Sebastian has developed the creative documentary training program *Indonesia – Ten Years After Reformasi* (2008 – 2013) and worked as a mentor at international doc film labs and initiatives since 2009. He has joined **First Cut Lab** as an Editing Consultant in 2019.



What would you say are the biggest challenges in contemporary documentary cinema?

"Documentary cinema today reaches from political activism to informational services to pure entertainment - and still: to the art of observational cinema.

As a film maker I look at it as art and I feel that the challenge has not changed: it is to **balance your personal artistic view with an utterly complicated world** and to reach out to others. Documentary cinema has questioned our perceptions of reality for more than 120 years. Observational films, and other documentary cinema formats offer an experiential space to the audience, a slice of non-scripted life, for individual and free thinking. It is exciting to try to genuinely add something from your heart and mind, and to contribute to a tradition or a language that universally changes a tiny little bit with every new work."

What role should an ethical approach have in documentary cinema?

"Nonfictional film makers have hassled a great deal with terminologies like truth, objectiveness or reality, which are debatable theoretical concepts but also touch on our personal sincerity. How do we experience a situation when we film it and how do we later render it in the process of *montage*? Do we accept certain flaws because they help us spice up the dramaturgy of the narration? **I believe that each documentary film project asks for its own filmmaking rules.** To find out about these is the essential ethical challenge for me that one should not shy away from as the integrity of everybody's work is at risk."

What is your approach in consulting nonfictional projects for the First Cut Lab?

"The *montage* of a documentary film is an immense puzzle. It can grow into a jungle and while you're inside, it is somehow intimidating. Especially after a long time, when you have turned every stone twice and all the arguments sound old. From my own *montage* experiences I know that **you have to let go in order to find.** I guess, I try to let go, because a new communication can only exist if you step back from your own defenses for a moment. It is a different process every time and there's no general remedy, but the key always lies within the team, as they know everything already. If we're lucky, we just pick it up."

A LIFE *like* ANY OTHER

First Cut Lab Belgium 2022

with the support of



Director: Faustine Cros

Advisors: Olena Decock, Rebecca De Pas, Matej Sotnik

Consultant editor: Maya Maffioli



A LIFE LIKE ANY OTHER

68 min., France, Belgium

Production company: Dérives, Les Films d'Ici

World premiere: DOK.Leipzig 2022

My father immortalized in family films the most beautiful moments of his life, while my mother's difficulties hit the blind spot of his images. Today, I revisit these images to tell a different story: that of a woman who sees her role as a mother take away her freedom step by step.

Director, writer: Faustine Cros

Producers: Julie Freres, Camille Laemle

Co-producers: Isabelle Christiaens, Mary Jimenez,
Javier Packer-Comyn

FAUSTINE CROS

director of *A Life Like Any Other*

A Life Like Any Other is about my mother's difficulties with motherhood told through the family movies of my dad and images that I'm filming today. I come from a family of filmmakers. My father and grandfather were directors. I grew up with men being behind the camera so in *A Life Like Any Other* it was my intention to question the male gaze in my family but also more generally in cinema. *One of the major decisions I took was to put my mother as the main subject of the film and not the images directed by my father.* I had to stand by that decision and make a film that I considered to be interesting and relevant for me where the question of cinema and images would not be more important than my mother's life.

Mental health issues are also a very important theme in the film. The film talks about the depression of my mother and a suicide attempt that happened in 2015. This is the starting point of the film and the rest is a quest trying to understand what happened to her and what led her to that moment. But I think the mental health issue is dealt much more to the front of the images that I filmed nowadays with her. There are scenes where we discuss directly about her suicide attempt or scenes where you can see the daily life of someone who goes through a heavy depression.

*"It was my intention to question the male gaze in my family,
but also more generally in cinema."*

Lying on the couch, smoking a lot of cigarettes, she wakes up a lot in the movie, she looks tired a lot, she doesn't want to go out, etc. All those elements and particularly the cigarettes - the chain smoking became elements that I thought were quite interesting to visualize the depression of my mother. When I started to film her in 2015, she was under heavy pills that made her very robotic and sometimes very absent. At that time, I didn't film a lot and I didn't feel comfortable filming her honestly. *But then we would talk about those moments together and she would always have this kind of spark and this punkish energy.*





She would tell me that for her it didn't matter to be shown depressed in the film. This was the reality of what it feels like. She found it much more interesting to be portrayed in this way because she didn't want to escape her condition or the reality of what she's going through. And I thought it was something beautiful for her to say and to be really proud of. Suddenly I started to look at her in a much stronger way and I realized that she still has a very sharp mind and she's very aware of what's going on. This changed the deal a bit. The more we were filming together, the more she became interested and involved. She helped me a lot and I tried to help her a lot to feel comfortable in front of and behind the camera. It became a very participative process. But it also took a long time. *I realized that it wasn't her who had to adapt to the shooting, it was the total opposite. It was the filmmaking process that has completely adapted to her.*

"She found it much more interesting to be portrayed in this way because she didn't want to escape her condition or the reality of what she's going through."

The story of my mother still resonates with me today because making this film made me realize that *I didn't understand at all what she was going through when I was a child.* And now I do. I do understand the pain she went through when she lost her job, the loneliness she felt as a stay-at-home mom, the ordinary sexism that was all around her at that time. Those are all the issues I understood that she was going through as a mother in the late 90s. This also makes me realize how unfair it is even now, so I think this is still very relevant. And now I also understand how tiring this must have been for her and why someone can give up in those situations. It's a tragedy in our society for both men and women, that we are constantly pushed to be fighters, to be competitive, to be strong and this is kind of the only way to survive in this world. I think it's unfair. That's one of the reasons why the story of my mother still resonates with me. But *it also resonates with me because I think nowadays motherhood can still be felt as a trap.* I always come down to this idea that there is still this preconceived thought on motherhood that it feels more natural for women to give up their career, their job and everything to raise the children rather than for men and of course, this is not true. It's not something natural. It just reveals how society is built around motherhood.

Finding the right distance in the film was for sure a huge challenge. It took years. I started editing with Cédric Zoenen and we edited for 9 weeks based on the rough cut that I did on my own. What we discussed more was my place as a filmmaker and as a character in the film. As another filmmaker after my father took the camera and filmed my mother. There was this whole pattern of transmission that we had to build narratively. My character as a filmmaker became part of the narrative of the film and you can see how slowly I find the right distance and I find more confidence to be behind the camera.

"What we discussed with my editor was my place as a filmmaker and as a character in the film."

When we participated in the **First Cut Lab**, the editing was already quite advanced. We realized that the character of my father was still missing some flesh and some humanity. It was very interesting to discuss it because it was never my intention to make a film where my father would be the one to blame for my mother's issues. But it was also not my intention to avoid the role of my father in my mother's life. It was a tricky balance to find. To discuss it again at the editing phase and so close to the end of the editing was very important and very helpful because it made me realize that I need to make my father a character that would be more rounded and fuller. There was a little step that was missing at the end of the film and the **First Cut Lab** helped me find it.

The lab helped me feel more confident about making an intimate film that could still be universal and resonate with all kinds of people. For me, it made me very confident that the film was solid enough and my intentions were understood.



AN ITALIAN *YOUTH*

First Cut Lab Trieste 2021

with the support of



Director: Mathieu Volpe

Advisors: Rémi Bonhomme, Veton Nurkollari, Justin Pechberty

Consultant editor: Benjamin Mirguet



AN ITALIAN YOUTH

80 min., Belgium, Italy, France
World premiere: Festival dei Popoli 2022

Sokuro , son of Burkinabé immigrants in Italy, perpetuates traditions by marrying Nassira in his native village. Back in Italy, Sokuro gets on with his daily life, his exhausting factory work, his absent father, his daily phone call to his wife asking him for more money for living. Suddenly, his boss fires him. Broke, Sokuro goes to Ouagadougou anyway, gets into debt to marry Nassira at the town hall, make it official and access a family reunion procedure. Returning once again to Italy, Sokuro aims at finding a stable job, to prove to authorities his capacity to support her.

Director: Mathieu Volpe
Producer: Robin Andelfinger

MATHIEU VOLPE

director of *An Italian Youth*

My film *An Italian Youth* follows the story of Sokuro, a young burkinabe immigrant that lives in Italy and decides to marry a woman from his village near Wagadugu. Over the course of the 4 years we followed their relationship but the movie also follows our exploration of the complexity of the relationship between the north and the south.

Everytime I start a new project, *I feel like the character of the movie chooses me*. In *An Italian Youth*, Sokuro and I had known each other for 3 or 4 years before the beginning of the project. And it was Sokuro himself that asked me in 2018 to follow him as he was getting married back in Africa. *The most important thing for me as a documentary filmmaker is to have the consent of the main character involved in the project*. Because it's the gateway for me to his reality. And after that, when my expectations of the movie are clear and I also understand what the things the character wants to share with the movie are, we can begin the process that is at the border of a documentary and fiction. Sokuro was writing a canvas of scenes for *An Italian Youth* and then we shot them during the production process. *It was very important for me to be able to involve my main protagonist in this process because it enables me to create a consensual image and a movie that everybody could be proud of*.



When you're a white filmmaker arriving in realities that are very different from yours, it's unethical not to make the families that are welcoming you part of the economy of the movie, especially when you arrive with a budget of 200K to make your movie. So for *An Italian Youth*, we always tried to find a way to compensate the people that were shooting with us, for their involvement in the project. We paid flight tickets, we paid meals, we paid some rent for staff. I was lucky because the producer of this movie understood this need. *I think ethics is rooted in the DNA of documentary filmmaking.* When I'm doing a documentary I always think about the fact that I'm leaving a trace. A trace of a story, a trace of a human being and this trace will stay, so this trace has to be most faithful to the character's perspective that is a real human being.

"When you're a white filmmaker arriving in realities that are very different from yours, it's unethical not to make the families that are welcoming you part of the economy of the movie."

Even though my story is very different from that of Sokuro, there is something that really resonates in me in his story. Because I always live between two countries, Belgium and Italy, Belgium is the country of my mother and Italy the one of my father, so I can understand Sokuro's feelings of being stuck in between two countries, because he left Burkina Faso when he was 14, and for that reason he's not rooted anywhere, because he doesn't feel like a Burkinabe and he doesn't feel like an Italian. So I think this was one of the feelings that I wanted to explore with *An Italian Youth*, this feeling that you don't belong anywhere.





"The advisors at First Cut Lab encouraged us a lot and they gave us directions and valuable advice to continue shooting."

Being part of the **First Cut Lab** was a great experience for the project, because we were lucky to do it between 2 shooting sessions. We shot almost 2/3s of the movie before the **First Cut Lab** workshop and having the feedbacks of all the editors and all the experts on our first version of the film was great. They encouraged us a lot and they gave us directions and valuable advice to continue shooting.

When we started the last part of the shooting, we knew exactly what was missing in the film. In the material that we submitted to the **First Cut Lab**, the advisors pointed out the fact that they missed some scenes between Sokuro and Nasira while they were together in Burkina Faso. One of the main issues the advisors pointed out in this edit was that we lacked some scenes that showed their relationship a bit more. It was a great chance to have this feedback before starting the shooting again so that we could try to imagine with our protagonists some scenes that we could have in the movie in order to create much more empathy for them.

DIVINE *factory*

First Cut Lab Philippines 2019

with the support of



Director: Joseph Mangat

Consultant editors: Maya Maffioli, Benjamin Mirguet



DIVINE FACTORY

120 min., Philippines, USA, Taiwan

Production company: Daluyong Studios, Volos Films

World premiere: DOK.Leipzig 2022

Divine Factory is a city factory in Metro Manila. Built as a labyrinth with multiple levels and buildings, it offers unsafe handcraft jobs to self-employed workers. There, the outcasts of the Filipino society fill their lungs with chemicals. Chabi and Maja, a lesbian couple with an 8 year-old son try to finance their new house. Chelsea and Rhea, two joyful lady-boys, deemed unlawful as online-sex-employees by the government, have become miniature painting experts. Their religious figurines will soon be bought, blessed and worshiped by Christians all over the world.

Director: Joseph Mangat

Producers: Alembert Ang, Stefano Centini

JOSEPH MANGAT

director of *Divine Factory*



Going into the project, *the main ethical question I struggled with was the fact that I'm somewhat of a foreigner* (I was born in the Philippines but I grew up in the U.S.), and documenting a community that many would consider impoverished can come off as exploitative. I also didn't want to focus solely on the harshness of their lives but I also didn't want to conceal the reality of their conditions. We had to find the right balance in every step of making the film. During pre-production, we made sure to be transparent about our intent both to the owners of the factory and to the individuals we were filming. We also made sure that everyone was comfortable with us by making sure they understood the process.

"The audience doesn't see what goes on behind the scenes, it's what's on the screen that matters."

But we also knew that the ethics of filmmaking extend beyond the process—the audience doesn't see what goes on behind the scenes, it's what's on the screen that matters. So we knew there are ethical issues when it comes to the form itself. *My DP, Albert Banzon, and I did discuss in length how to visually counter the films that typically deal with poverty.* We didn't want to emphasize what's already apparent—their harsh working and living conditions. We instead wanted to show what we were both fascinated by—the beauty in the mundane—the meticulousness of painting hundreds of tiny statues by hand, the layers of resin and paint that have accumulated over the years on a particular wall, etc. We both thought the best way to showcase this was to keep the camera static and allow the audience the time to discover the beauty we see but still understand their conditions.

Most of the shooting was done while they were working. Many of the participants were subcontractors and they told us beforehand that they held their hours however we still made sure not to impede on their work by aligning our shooting schedules with theirs. *We made sure at every opportunity that they weren't losing any business while being a part of the film.* We did make sure they were well-fed during production but as far as us making sure they were treated well, it was the opposite—they were the ones always making sure that we had everything we needed. They were so accommodating to us. Talking with them after they seemed to have enjoyed the process and viewed their experience as very memorable. Concerning the hierarchies between protagonist and filmmaker—*I feel like just like anyone else in my crew I also view the protagonists I document as collaborators.*



"The protagonists were the ones always making sure that we had everything we needed."



First, I want to say I'm not part of the queer community and my intention was not for the film to speak for them. The queer element of the film happened by chance. It was a coincidence that a majority of the factory workers are LGBTQ. But I do think the workers being LGBTQ reveals another layer of the complex relationship that Philippine society has with sexuality and religion. Although I was very much concerned with any blowback to the individuals in the film, the queer protagonists didn't need my protection. Similar to the factory, being queer in the Philippines represents several contradictions. They are accepted very much in society, especially in the entertainment industry.

Seeing queer protagonists on film is very much a norm in Filipino Cinema, but with that said, Catholicism has a much more stranglehold on society and is deeply ingrained in the culture-- whatever they say goes. I believe this is a major reason the queer community here will never truly be accepted. You hear and see this irony in the film - the fact that many of the LGBTQ in the factory are religiously devout and that they've accepted the prejudices of the church without question

"The many rejections and the lack of support and money gave us a lot of doubt about the project but our mentor Benjamin Mirguet guided my editor and me to have confidence in our vision."

First Cut Lab was the first lab the project participated in. We were rejected by others. It came at the right moment in the development of the project. The many rejections and the lack of support and money gave us a lot of doubt about the project but our mentor Benjamin Mirguet guided my editor and me to have confidence in our vision. The fact that the entire team believed in the film's potential motivated us to continue.

Specifically, the ending was highly discussed. Each of the mentors had different ideas on where to place the scene that's now at the end of the film. Although each gave valid reasons for their preference they supported us in making this decision ourselves. I think what helped is the fact they all agreed that this is a crucial scene and we understood that the placement no matter where will convey something differently. They supported us with our vision and I feel that was the key takeaway to the lab--to give care and thought to every decision we make with the film.



LIKE *an* ISLAND

First Cut Lab Switzerland 2021

with the support of

**SOLOTHURN
FILM FESTIVAL**

Director: Tizian Büchi

Advisors: Jad Abi-Khalil, Paolo Bertolin, Suzy Gillett

Consultant editor: Benjamin Mirguet



LIKE AN ISLAND

106 min., Switzerland

Production company: Alva Film

World premiere: Visions du Réel 2022

In the heat of the summer, two watchmen secure the river that runs through a neighbourhood in Lausanne. Ammar is new to the job, and Daniel shares his experience with him. During their rounds and encounters with the inhabitants, they observe and are observed, while bonds are being formed. And the question arises: what could have happened by the river?

Director, writer: Tizian Büchi

Producers: Thomas Reichlin, Britta Rindelaub

Co-producers: Tizian Büchi, Michael Scheuplein, Clotilde Wüthrich



PERSONAL POV

TIZIAN BÜCHI

director and writer of *Like an Island*

My relationship to nature and the way I work with it in my films can be traced to my previous short film. I shot it in the Swiss mountains. It was at a very remote place and for the first time, I felt as if nature was bringing in these very mystical and magical feelings. Many things are happening and in a way, you're hearing a lot of stuff that might belong to other worlds. I found it very powerful to experience nature as a place of openness, full of possibilities and magic too. One of the main protagonists in this particular film I made before *Like an Island* seemed to be similarly influenced by nature and imagining stories in it. After working on that short movie I realized I wanted to research these magical places and experiences through my film more. And I did just that with *Like an Island* only this time with a more urban context. Still, in the urban neighborhood that the film explores there is this specific space by the river with nature all round. It had the openness and the possibility to explore which I was looking for and that was the starting point for the film as well. It also allowed me to get to know the people who live around the river. They were willing to play around with inventing or sharing their stories and they were also open to the magic in this very realistic context too which I found to be very intriguing.

"I felt as if nature was bringing in these very mystical and magical feelings."



I think magical realism is something I truly care about because *I feel that reality and magic can cohabit together in a natural way*. There are invisible elements that we meet every day and in my films I try to find a space for them. Mixing fiction and documentary approach therefore comes quite naturally for me. I first need to find a place, a territory and the people that inspire me. And from these meetings which are an authentic part of the documentary process I create the mise-en-scène and fictionalized magical scenes as the next step. Then it all comes together.

I knew about the place from *Like an Island* from my friends who live in this neighborhood. It's quite remote, very far from the city center so if you don't live there, you have no reason to visit it really. Almost nobody knows about it and neither did I.

My friends introduced me to the people who live there and by slowly getting to know them all I was able to discern certain themes that I incorporated in the film, such as the multiculturalism of the place. The two main characters Daniel and Amar are also both from a migration background. It became thematic quite spontaneously in the film. And this idea of a community was then more fictionalized in a way.



"The neighborhood has a sense of community there and I wanted to encourage it."

There is a lot of control in Switzerland for people in the situation of migration especially from the administration that takes care of social housing. When I met all the people there, I had an impression that in a way they form a community towards the outside world or towards the dominant places in the city too. The places where you have the view of the mountains or the lake which are supposed to be the most lucrative views. The neighborhood has none of that but they do have a sense of community there and I want to encourage this kind of community in a way. Because it really is an island by the river that actually gives power to all the people who live there by being out of sight of the state control as well. It's not an ideal place and the community has issues for sure, so it's a complex place.

Of course the topic of the film is to show that the surveillance here is absurd. My link to all that is probably the link to liberty and to give the people the opportunity to live their life without being always controlled. I think these are elements we all face in our everyday life. We want to live the life we want and not the life our families or the state or whoever wants us to live. At the same time, it might not necessarily be the control that this place needs but more so attention. And that's also where Daniel and Amar slowly move towards the end of the film. They're not really security agents in the neighborhood, they are there to pay attention and take care of this place by the river and the people living there.





The version of the film we sent to **First Cut Lab**, especially to the different experts, was quite different from the final cut of the film. It was the first time we had such feedback from people who didn't know anything about the material before watching it. It was also a bit disturbing but very helpful to precise certain elements in the film. But since the version was very different, it just confronted us to go back to the previous version.

"The meetings and exchanges with First Cut Lab helped us clean some moments in the film and make it more fluent."

The third version we sent to the **First Cut Lab** was based mainly on Amar and Daniel and their relationship and political issues that were also more precise and more in the dialogues of this version. There was a bit less of the neighborhood, a bit less of the magical parts of the film. We missed it quite quickly after the meeting with **First Cut Lab** and probably all the impressions they gave us confronted us to get back to our previous version.

The **First Cut Lab** helped us to get rid of some underline or explanatory elements too. It pointed out some cheap fictional moments between the main protagonists. The meetings and exchanges with **First Cut Lab** helped us clean these moments and make the film more fluent. I really appreciated the exchanges with all the experts who helped us to identify the film. How to identify it for the market and to identify what are the main elements, what is beautiful, what is important in the film. It was interesting just to have these impressions from outside and from people who didn't know anything about the writing and the process.



www.firstcutlab.eu

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