

APDIG TERM PAPER December 2013

DEFINING DESIGN: THE DEBATE

How design is presented in the media, business and government

In this paper we propose that design is suffering from a PR problem, which leaves it misunderstood and undervalued by government, underused by business, and misrepresented in the media. To demonstrate what we mean by 'PR problem', take this parallel example. The concept of 'architect' is well understood by most people. It has a high linguistic currency, it is easily taken to signify a particular set of activities, and standards of quality around designing and constructing buildings. Now, there are a whole class of professionals out there who would refer to themselves as 'designers', of one sort or another. 'Designer' does not perform, for this group of professionals, the same useful shorthand as 'architect' does for architects. An architect would not have to explain to a client (or a politician or a journalist) exactly what function it is that they perform. Designers frequently do.

This is not a new problem – indeed designers have been complaining of such things for years. However it has been brought to the fore again recently by the work DCMS has undertaken to update their 'creative industries' taxonomy. What we hope to trigger with *this paper* is a conversation about how designers themselves can take charge of these representation problems by working towards a better articulation of what they do. We have five short essays from five brilliant thinkers on this topic. Dr James Moultrie

from Cambridge University kicks us off with a discussion of why better articulation of the industry is crucial, and how we might embark upon it. Mark Spilsbury, former Chief Economist at the UK Commission for Employment and Skills tackles the nitty gritty of how government, in its own way, classifies and adds up design's economic impact. Dr Nick de Leon, service design lead at the Royal College of Art, argues that government itself is in desperate need of better implementation of design. Angus Montgomery, Editor of Design Week, tackles the industry's own self-doubts in communicating confidently. And design PR expert, Yvonne Courtney, looks at how the media depiction of design has regressed in recent years, reducing it to a few frocks and chairs on the lifestyle pages.

'I am persuaded that we should classify design, and that if possible the industry itself should provide that classification. But who will decide that? And in what forum will you agree how you should do this? In such an apparently anarchic, creative, chaotic sector? Because you need to find a way to do it before it's done to you.'

Peter Luff MP, 'Classifying Design' Debate Chair

The key question for the design sector, rightly identified by Peter Luff MP above, is this matter of who will speak for the sector, in a powerful and coordinated way, to government? Should we follow the example of Australia, and unify design representative bodies? Should we emulate the UK Automotive Council, drawing the heads of industry bodies and businesses into one government-facing board? Or should we work through an overarching group like the Royal Designers for Industry?

Over the coming months, the APDIG will continue to support the aspects of this conversation that relate to government, working with industry to suggest refinements to the way government classifies design, and responding to that time-old issue of poor understanding. Follow our progress here:

www.policyconnect.org.uk/apdig

Essay One

Why might we need to give thought to how we classify design?



Dr James Moultrie, University of Cambridge

Following the APDIG's first debate in July, which examined the pros and cons of 'classifying design', I was struck both by the imperative to move forward on this, and the inherent trickiness of the task.

Past attempts to set out what is and isn't design have sometimes been rejected by the design community. But then, as designers, we really ought to consider the users of any classification system. In this instance, the intended users are not designers themselves, but the national statistics bodies that wish to tell a story about design. Classification is needed to enable measurement. Measurement is needed to provide evidence. Evidence is helpful in informing policy. Meaningful classification is therefore a prerequisite of sensible policy.



So why haven't we done it already? One reason is the confounding 'design is everything' argument: one can argue that a surgeon, for example, designs solutions to

medical problems. This is essentially true, but it's clearly unhelpful in enabling sensible policy making around design. We need to be somewhat more precise about what is, and what is not, 'design'. We need to place a boundary around it. And depending on where that boundary is placed, some people will be happy, others not – which makes it a difficult conversation to start.

Secondly, bruised egos aside, it is logistically tricky to collect data. Existing classification schemes are inconsistent, and data on design can only be inferred from various statistical sources, such as:

- Education at a university level, to provide indication of the supply of designers from the education base.
- Employment within the design services sector and within industry to give an indication of the demand for graduates and the supply of design work to either industry or the public sector.
- Data regarding the design services sector specifically, to provide insight into demand for the outsourcing of design work.
- Data regarding the sale and exports of goods and services that have been designed.

In each case the categorisation used is different and the resulting picture which emerges is thus inconsistent. However, together, these data sources *might* enable a story to be told, if we could establish some

boundaries to determine what is and is not design.

So how could we decide what counts as design? In every country, these boundaries are in different places. For example, in Canada, statistics on the design services industry includes landscape architecture, interior design, industrial design, graphic design and 'other' design. In Finland, data on the design services sector encompasses graphic design and industrial design, whilst architecture is not included. The US Bureau of Labor Statistics includes interior design, industrial design, graphic design and other specialised design services (e.g. clothing, fashion, jewellery and textiles) under NAICS 5413. **In the UK, within the Standard Industry Classification system, most design businesses fall under the catch all term of 'speciality design activities' (74.1).** However there is no distinction here between disciplines.

For education, gaining sensible data on design in the UK is difficult, as within the Higher Education Statistics Authority classifications, design topics fall under many specialisms in both the arts and sciences. Degree titles might include software design, engineering design, graphic design, multimedia design etc. Identifying the degrees that fall within the boundary of design (or not) is next to impossible, and there is no consistency of approach.

A further complexity arises in the way in which the design sector has evolved in the last 10 years. **Service design, experience design and public sector design are all phenomena that are changing more quickly than the established classification schemes.**

A pragmatic way forward might be to agree a core set of things that are not contested or disputed as design. This would enable a core of data to be established that is agreed and non-controversial. A second layer of design topics/ areas might enable a broader but possibly more contestable picture to be painted. A third and even broader layer might offer a bigger but even more contestable option.

In summary, before determining the classification we need to be certain about who will use it. We might then 'design' some alternatives and prototype them. These could be tested by the users to see whether the proposed classifications would enable meaningful and comparable data collection. We should also recognise that any solution will be contestable and thus something that is helpful but only **80% right is better than striving for unattainable perfection. It is preferable that this 80% solution is one proposed by the design community rather than imposed upon them.**

“Design is absolutely part of our industrial heritage... but so often government talks about it in the context of cultural – rather than industrial – policy.”

Lesley Morris, design policy expert



Essay Two

How does government classify and measure the design industry today? And what could we do better?

Mark Spilsbury, senior economist and classification expert

The Government, since the end of the Second World War, has recognised a need to measure the economy and its constituent parts in order that it can understand how it operates, can track trends and changes and from this, create public policy which is best able to secure desired outcomes (such as balanced economic growth and development).

The building blocks for classifying, and then measuring, sectors are the official classification systems which are used across the economy, the *Standard Industrial Classification* system (which describes the economic activity of businesses) and the *Standard Occupational Classification* system (which describes the jobs of individuals).

These classification systems have been subject to criticism on the extent to which they accurately capture the underlying economic activities they are supposed to reflect. These (from the viewpoint of creative industries and design) mainly reflect:

- the ability of classification systems which are only updated every 10 years or so to continue to accurately represent a changing set of industries. This is particularly true for the creative industries, where the impact of **digitisation is changing the industrial landscape at a rapid rate; and**
- the 'embedded' nature of many activities – such as design. Here the designers work across an entire range of sectors and are fundamental to the industrial process – but

the value of their activities are allocated to the sector in which the designers work, not to the design process itself.

Using this system the Government has, since 1998, estimated the size and structure of the Creative Industries.¹ Within this, the specific industry (SIC) code to capture design activities is *SIC 74.1 'Specialised design activities'*.² Industries included within this are:

- **fashion design**, which encompasses the obvious things, like 'textiles, wearing apparel, shoes, jewellery' but also includes, oddly, 'furniture and other interior decoration and other fashion goods as well as other personal or household goods';
- **industrial design**, defined as 'creating and developing designs and specifications that optimise the use, value and appearance of products, including the determination of the materials, mechanism, shape, colour and surface finishes of the product, taking into consideration human characteristics and needs, safety, market appeal in distribution, use and maintenance';

¹ Department of Culture, Media and Sport, Creative Industries Mapping Document

² All SIC codes have a code number and a title.

- the activities of **graphic designers**; and
- the activities of **interior decorators**.³

Clearly this is a very broad classification for design, with different industrial activities included within it. No disaggregation of data is available below this level: so there are no separate SIC codes for, for example, fashion and industrial design. It is impossible to easily and accurately disentangle from within the national data sources the very different activities of, say interior decorators and graphic designers.



The situation would be eased slightly if the employment and activities of individual designers could be identified using the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC). Here the situation is slightly better, but only marginally so, in that there are two SOC codes which cover 'design occupations', which are:

- *SOC 3421*: Graphic designers, who are defined as 'using illustrative, sound, visual and multimedia techniques to convey a message for information, entertainment, advertising, promotion or publicity purposes, and create special visual effects and animations for computer games, film, interactive and other media'; and
- *SOC 3422*: Product, clothing and related designers who are defined as those who

'plan, direct and undertake the creation of designs for new industrial and commercial products, clothing and related fashion accessories, costumes and wigs, and for building interiors and stage sets'.⁴

As with the Standard Industrial Classification, these categories are very broad, gathering together many different types of designers into broad groups, within which it's impossible to detect the size and importance of each sector.

There is an additional complication, in that some activities we would typically identify as 'design' are spread across different parts of the SIC and SOC classifications. For example:

- In the SIC system, we have designers working in IT, where they design the structure and content of systems software, including websites and computer games (*SIC 62.01*), we have architectural activities (*SIC 71.11*) and we have engineering design activities for industrial process and production (*SIC 71.12*)
- In the SOC system, we have design-related occupations to be found in the worlds of Engineering Professionals, with Design and development engineers (*SOC 2126*), in Information Technology and Telecommunications Professionals with IT business analysts, architects and systems designers (*SOC 2135*), and Web design and development professionals (*SOC 2137*), and in architecture we have Architects (*SOC 2431*) and Chartered architectural technologists (*SOC 2435*).

There may be differing views as to whether these are all design activities or even 'designers' but as it stands the classification systems place them squarely away from

³ UK Standard Industrial Classification of Economic Activities, 2007, Office for National Statistics

⁴ Standard Occupational Classification 2010, Volume 1, Structure and descriptions of unit groups, Office for National Statistics

'design' industries and occupations and into other areas of work.

Does this matter? I would argue that without an adequate definition of the design sector, our measurement of it is inadequate. We do not know if it is growing or shrinking, whether it is in robust health or in need of help. Without measurement, we cannot provide evidence of what is happening, and therefore even in an age where the primacy of 'evidence-based policy' is weakening, policy will be poorer for the lack of a decent classification system.

And does this matter? An industry which does have visibility, helped by its coherent and identifiable SIC codes is Car Manufacturing. In July of this year, the Government announced that it was investing £500 million over the next ten years in the industry to research, develop and commercialise the technologies for the vehicles of the future, which will help employers in the sector to recruit more than 7,600 apprentices and 1,700 graduates over the next five years and to double the number of jobs created or secured in the automotive supply chain through foreign investment over the next three years to 15,000. Backed by companies in the sector, the commitment is

expected to secure at least 30,000 jobs linked to producing engines and create many more in the supply chain.

By being visible, by telling a story of success, the Car Manufacturing industry has convinced the Government to invest hard cash in its infrastructure. But is the car industry so much more important than the design industry (even ignoring the important role that designers play in the car industry). Even on the limited SIC code that 'Specialised design activities' represent, design employs around 100,000 in the UK, compared to 180,000 in car manufacturing – and this does not take account of all the other design activities we have identified or the designers embedded across the rest of the UK economy.

There is clearly a need for the design industry to improve its profile amongst policy makers in order that it can benefit from the kind of Government backing that other sectors are benefitting from. However, to do this, it needs to clarify what is included within the design sector and engage with the relevant Government statisticians to ensure that it is properly measured.

“The main understanding we need to undo in government is the idea that to bring in design is to prettify something. It’s actually about thinking – and government pours billions into, for example, A&E departments, without doing the necessary thinking about how it’s going to work. The chaos is costing us money.” **Mark Adams, CEO, Vitsoe**

“Government spends over £150bn on public procurement, and it spends about £1.5tr on public services. As a citizen I’d like that £1.5tr to have some design in it. And every time you go out to procure something, I’d like to think there’s some design in that too.”

Dr Nick de Leon, RCA

Essay Three

Design: an essential tool for government

Dr Nick de Leon, Head of Service Design, Royal College of Art



There is an old management adage, what gets measure gets done. The challenge for design is defining the “what” and knowing not just how to measure “it”, but also how to measure its impact.

For design to be on the policy agenda, for governments of any complexion, requires evidence not just anecdote. And the source of evidence is HM Treasury. Subsuming design within the Creative Industries Sector with its rich spectrum of enterprises, from antique dealers to software publishing, makes it almost impossible to distinguish design’s impact from the other 90% of industries that make up this sector. Classification would at least enable governments and the civil service to consider design and begin to measure it directly and independently. This of course begs the question what is there to measure and why.

According to the Design Council (2010) there are 232,000 designers in the UK generating £15bn in fee income and company in-house design budgets. What is more interesting is to see the impact of design on business competitiveness and employment. The British design industry is certainly making an impact that goes well beyond fee income. As Apple’s market capitalisation climbs once more over \$500bn, what might be the contribution of design to the firm’s value, certainly meriting the knighthood bestowed on Jonathan Ive. World beating British companies such as Burberry, headed by the designer Christopher Bailey, have shown that design led innovation has an impact well beyond the salaries of the

design department. The renaissance of Jaguar and Land Rover, with Ian Callum and Gerry McGovern at their design helms, are delivering billions in GVA to the UK economy and boosting UK employment. And Sir James Dyson continues to innovate, transforming the nature of home appliances, growing market share and driving UK employment in high value added engineering, technology and design sectors.

A recent report commissioned by the Korean Ministry of Finance was presented at the World Design Policy Forum in Seoul in October 2013. It demonstrated that design has created three times more value add to industry than other R&D areas. For instance the multiplier on employment creation by the design industry is 13.9 compared to 4.5 in, for instance, the semiconductor industry. It was the evidence that the Korean President was seeking to determine that nation's strategy for investing in the sector. On a similar basis, the UK's design sector may be contributing around £100bn each year to the economy with not just hundreds of thousands of jobs dependent on it but potentially millions. Of course the UK's design industry is highly international, working with the world's leading corporations, so that impact is not felt wholly in the UK. But that's the opportunity for government. If the treasury was actually measuring the global impact and the UK impact, it could better recommend policy to BIS to enhance Britain's industry competitiveness.

But perhaps the biggest impact is not just in our traditional industry base, but in the services sector. This represents around 80% of our economy and employment, and innovations in the services sector create employment gains that are overwhelmingly in the UK. Service Design is one of our most rapidly growing and internationally recognised design disciplines. Major service providers in

the UK, from Financial Services to major outsourcers and professional services firms are hiring service designers to transform the value of their propositions. One of the biggest potential beneficiaries is the government itself. The impact of GOV.UK on informational and now basic transactional services has been recognised by the design industry, HM Treasury and the Cabinet Office. The opportunity to extend that impact to more complex transactional and relational public services is beginning.

The Service Design department at the Royal College of Art is already working with the Ministry of Justice, the NHS, and MIND on more complex relational services addressing the Criminal Justice System, Patient Services and Mental Health support, and the value of service design is clear. Designers can transform the quality of public service provision for our citizens, improve the satisfaction and morale of hundreds and thousands of public sector workers, and substantially reduce the cost of service delivery for the public purse. NESTA and the UK Design Council have made the case for this very eloquently. Public Sector expenditure by central and local government is around £700bn annually, 49.1% of GDP, and public procurement is around £150bn. The stakes are enormous. Classifying design and measuring not only the value of the sector, but the multiplying effect on the economy will enable government to target investment in education, the supply side, thereby enhancing an already world class resource and making it a strategic sector for the UK. Driving the demand side through targeted public sector expenditure and service procurement, as well as encouraging industry to make the very best of British talent can radically improve the quality of public services, reduce the growing demands on the public purse, and make British industry more competitive.

“we, in design, need to overcome our nervousness about holding on to our non-conformity.”

Edwin Heathcote, FT critic

Essay Four

Why don't designers want to call themselves designers?

Angus Montgomery, Editor, Design Week



The problem with using the word ‘design’ to describe an industry, is that it’s incredibly hard to accurately convey what this term means and what its parameters are.

What unites, for example, someone working in brand strategy, someone modelling aircraft interiors of the future and someone creating a new set of cutlery? Are they all designers? And, more pertinently, do they all want to be *called* designers?

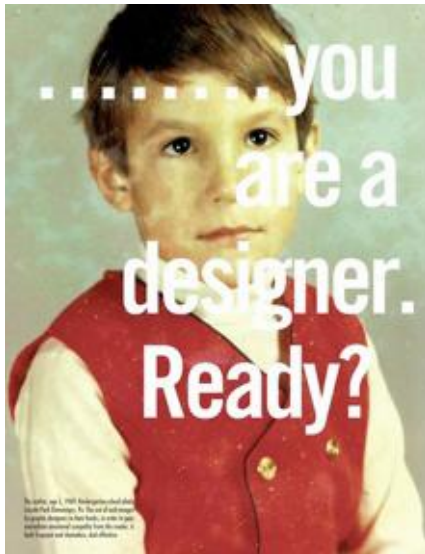
All of them are involved in the creation of something new – be it a set of guidelines, a way of thinking or a tangible product, but all might describe what they do and how they do it in very different ways. There are several reasons for this. Most obviously **design, unlike many other industries, has no accreditation, no protection of title.** Anyone can go into business as a designer and can pretty much define the terms of what they do. An architect, by contrast, will have to have studied to a certain level (Part 3) and be registered with the Architects Registration Board.

The obvious day-to-day effect of this is that when you hire an architect you know pretty

much what you’re going to get and what you expect them to do. When a designer is hired, it’s often up to them to describe to the client what, exactly, their function is. This lack of definition is exacerbated by a lack of representation. To use architecture as an example again, there are two main organisations – the ARB, which registers architects, and the RIBA, which represents their interests. Their functions (usually) dovetail pretty well.

Design, on the other hand, has a plethora of representative bodies – the Design Business Association, the Chartered Society of Designers, D&AD, and the Design Council to name but a few – most of which work on behalf of a slice of the industry, but none of them represent and define it as a whole.

And then you come up against a resistance from designers to describe themselves as designers. It’s a bit of a cliché (but nonetheless surely true) that this is in some



part due to the non-conformist, challenging nature of designers. Financial Times architecture and design critic Edwin Heathcote says, 'Designers, because they come out of art school, are a little bit punky and tend to slightly resist something like classification.' But this non-conformism isn't just an affectation, it is often done for pragmatic reasons too. Heathcote continues, '[Designers] don't want to be pigeonholed. They want to be able to use their skills wherever designers are needed.'

I recently spoke to the co-founder of a highly successful consultancy working on heavily-involved projects with blue chip clients. Most of the consultancy's staff come from a traditional design background (product, packaging, information design etc.) and the work they do

could broadly be described as design work – brand creation, innovation product design, digital campaigns. Unlike many consultancies though, they've managed to get to the top table with big companies, and work on projects that influence them at a strategic level. 'How have you managed to do this?' I asked. 'Well,' came the response, 'We make sure we don't call ourselves designers.'

Herein lies the Catch-22. Designers don't want to call themselves designers because clients don't appreciate what this means. But perhaps clients don't understand what design is because so few people describe their work as design.

This might not seem like such a serious issue, but when that lack of understanding extends as far up as Government failing to support the design industry, and as far down as individual clients recoiling from the term 'design' then there is a problem. A pragmatic classification of design would of course be limiting and imperfect. But it would have the effect of legitimising what design is in many people's eyes (not least those holding the purse-strings). And of course, as soon as you put boundaries around what the term 'design' means, then designers can get on with their job of pushing those boundaries as far as they can go.

"I've heard a lot of people saying they don't describe themselves as a designer because it's not a respected term. Perhaps having some recognised classification, set by government, producing tangible numbers about benefit and value, would enable us all to say we're designers with pride." Erika Clegg, Spring.

'Design is already at the heart of good business. It should be commented upon in the business pages as well. But why isn't it?'
Jim Dawton.



Essay Five

Stop Press! Why don't editors know how to view and position design?

Yvonne Courtney, design and consumer culture PR strategist, writer and curator

Earlier this summer a story lambasting the cost of design hit the newswires; the revelation that Thomas Heatherwick Studio was paid just over £400,000 in fees for its work on the New Bus for London.

Regardless of putting the fee in context of the total project, the implication that this was wasted money does a huge disservice to the value of design while adding to the depressing dialogue of how designers can be treated in the national press. Is it any wonder that a great many creatives don't describe themselves as designers because it is not a respected term?

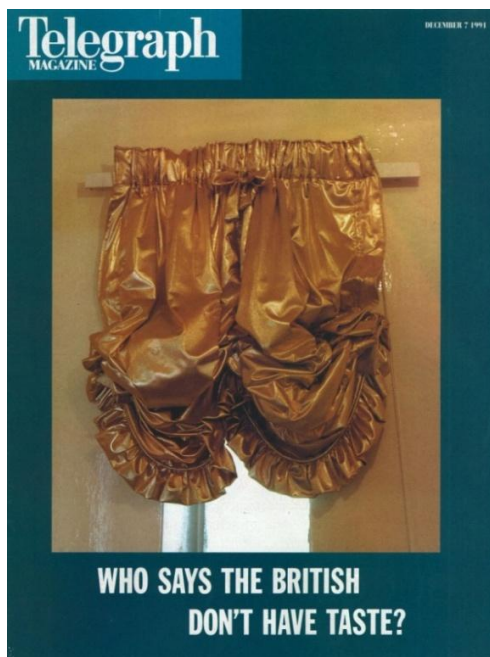
It wasn't always this way. Playing a part in launching and promoting London's Design Museum during its early years in the 1990s, there was a tremendous appetite and positivity for design in both the public domain and the national press, which was receptive to even the more specialist exhibitions, many of which had a focus on graphic, public service and transport design. Fast forward to 2013, consulting for the newly formed Cheltenham Design Festival which explores how design

should evolve in such areas as education, the environment, an ageing population, technology and business, I was informed by one broadsheet design editor that 'unless its fashion or interiors to forget it', while another lamented, 'design is stuck between fashion, consumables, retail furniture and domestic makeover. Editors don't know how to view it or where to put it. Tragic.'

This is incredibly frustrating and somewhat baffling. Why do newspaper editors assume people's appetite for design runs to someone's recently done-up pad and the best high street coats, or tea towels?

Working with the Associate Parliamentary Design and Innovation Group (APDIG) and Design Week on the issue of how design is presented within the media, business, culture and government, from my perspective this

important debate has been spurred by the increasing failure of the press to properly recognise, understand and place design. Design is not receiving the profile, patronage and policy initiatives it deserves. It is not the preserve of what's seen on the catwalk, in the cinema or on TV. Design talent and ingenuity lies at the heart of Britain's innovation and entrepreneurialism which drives our entire economy. It's time this was recognised, nurtured and celebrated.



As Financial Times architecture and design critic Edwin Heathcote pointed out in the debate, "it's interesting to note in the UK, there isn't a single 'design critic' on any newspaper, unlike elsewhere in Europe. There are architecture and design critics – design is always either tacked on to the end of architecture, or treated as lifestyle or luxury. To be a design critic is to potentially write about anything. That elusiveness could allow it to permeate throughout the paper."

The word 'design' still tends to conjure up for the press avant-garde fashion, expensive kitchen gizmos or shiny new cars, thanks to a century-long celebration of objects, but our world has changed and such things no longer

represent a target for creatives' efforts. The "experience economy" has recast design as a fundamental discipline for managing the complexity of the future. This is because designers humanise technology and visualise concepts, systems and services that don't yet exist for how the future ought to be. Design is a way of thinking about the world. There's a certain magic when a product simply works... or when a company's customer service satisfies instead of frustrates or when a website gives exactly the information you need... Such seemingly serendipitous moments are the result of 'design thinking' – which has yet to enter the thoughts of commissioning editors.

For while design in practice has shifted from being about things to being about value, empathy and storytelling, the press' perception of design does not acknowledge or portray this. It needs to move beyond a celebration of things and recognise the power of systems, emotions and stories.

Newspaper editors (and their art departments) consider how design stories look on the printed page despite the fact that they are increasingly read online or on mobile devices. Digital media is more conducive for covering 'design thinking' stories in ways that can't jump off the printed page which means print editors need to think laterally about how to complement this.

The press is failing to capture the abundant energy, diversity and sheer wonder of design in a digital, globalised age. If it covered design's impact in our everyday lives with more diverse, meaningful and inspirational stories, this in turn could not only engage and educate the wider public, but would help the government and business community process what it is that design can do, so steering future policy and strategy respectively.

The All-Party Parliamentary Design and Innovation Group is a forum for open debate between Parliament and the UK's design and innovation communities. To find out more visit

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