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By not for: Arts Management in a digital age

In a digital age, everyone is a creative producer, a publisher and distributor – from Facebook posts, to YouTube videos. Creative production and knowledge distribution has been changed forever by Web 2.0 technologies. This chapter explores how this new operating environment has generated both challenges and opportunities for the cultural sector.

The innovation and creativity writer, Charles Leadbeater argues that there is a notable cultural shift away from things being done *for* us towards a new model of things being done *with* us (Leadbeater, 2009). Describing how the age-old rhetoric of politicians working “for us” is being cast aside by a new rhetoric of “we did this together”, he suggests that, “The spirit of *with* took Barack Obama to the White House as thousands upon thousands of volunteers organised over the web and took to the phones to get out the vote”. The principle of *with* is that knowledge is co-produced and comes from multiple diverse sources including traditionally qualified experts but also enthusiasts and “Pro-Ams”.

The challenge then, for arts managers is to create an open culture and to work with diverse voices rather than simply a self-appointed guild of geeks. As Gauntlett reminds us, “social capital is a resource based on trust and shared values” (Gauntlett, 2011, p. 133). Trust is something, which needs to come from both within and outside

the institution, and understanding is central to creating a trusting relationship between patrons and institutions.

In an increasingly digital world, technology and remix culture has opened up the avenues to participation. No longer do patrons need to be invited to participate, nor does participation necessarily need to exist within the scaffolded confines of the cultural organisation. Increasingly, participation is becoming self-directed, with patron-generated participatory practices existing in parallel to facilitated participatory opportunities offered by an institution. This chapter surveys innovative approaches to audience and art form development and the role that digital technologies and digital culture are having on the work of the contemporary arts manager.

Digital literacy and the arts manager

Digital culture and digital technologies have long been central to marketing campaigns engaging with audiences, education programmes and increasingly to art form development (Grefe, 2004; Kelly, 2010; Miles, 2017). However digital technologies have now become so pervasive that more than simply providing communication platforms, which replace traditional analogue modes of communicating with audiences; these technologies have created a wider cultural shift with audiences now seeking to enter into a reciprocal dialogue with cultural institutions.

Web 1.0, the first generation of World Wide Web technologies and user experience opened up access to information, however with the birth of Web 2.0 and social media we have seen a move towards participatory engagement, web users rather than simply consumers of information are now active creators and participants in the development and analysis of available knowledge. Tim O'Reilly and Dale Dougherty coined the

term 'Web 2.0' in 2004, they defined it as a move towards the creation of software tools that would create a more participatory web (O'Reilly, 2005). However their initial emphasis on software and technology platforms has in recent years 'lost its tether to the web-programming models it espoused and has become closely linked to a design aesthetic and a marketing language' (Mandiberg, 2012, p. 4), as such Web 2.0 can best be defined as an 'ethos or approach' (Gauntlett, 2011, p. 5) rather than a defined technology platform.

The ethos and technologies developed since the birth of web 2.0 has prompted cultural institutions to begin to develop new relationships with their audiences (Russo and Peacock, 2009). Social Media has provided new ways to collect and share information, and harness 'collective intelligence' (O'Reilly, 2005), this approach is a significant value shift as it requires arts institutions to move away from the role of custodian of knowledge towards a more open model, that recognises there is more talent outside of the institution than within it. While such technologies bring opportunities for arts organisations across many disciplines to become more efficient and relevant cultural institutions, they also present problems for senior managers and established arts managers who may not possess the necessary digital literacy and skills base to fully implement such technologies within their institutions (Stein, n.d.).

The term digital literacy was coined by Paul Gilster, in his 1997 book, *Digital Literacy*, in this text he defined digital literacy as, 'the ability to understand and use information in multiple formats from a wide range of sources when it is presented via computers' (Gilster, 1997). Digital Literacy is a term that emerged from the concept of literacy, which Jones and Flannigan argue has historically been used to distinguish between the educated and uneducated classes (Jones and Flannigan, n.d.). Literacy

originally referred to the ability to read and write, however multiple more nuanced definitions have emerged in recent years from information to media to digital literacy. Hobbs for example speaks of the interplay between digital and media in their definition of digital literacy:

People need the ability to access, analyze and engage in critical thinking about the array of messages they receive and send in order to make informed decisions about the everyday issues they face regarding health, work, politics and leisure (Hobbs, 2010).

Perhaps then rather than a single definition of literacy, we are moving towards a world where multiple literacies are required to succeed in both personal and professional life. In a comparative analysis of digital literacy research from an international perspective Pietrass notes that across the available definitions three prominent categories emerge, namely: media analysis, media selection and media production (Pietrass, 2007). This multiple literacy model centres on the need to be able to both create and consume information on a variety of digital and analogue platforms (Bawden, 2001). The New York City, Department of Education, provides us with a useful definition of digital literacy, which incorporates these three components and places an emphasis on production and collaboration alongside consumption

Digital literacy is more than knowing how to send a text or watch a music video. It means having the knowledge and ability to use a range of technology tools for varied purposes. A digitally literate person can use technology

strategically to find and evaluate information, connect and collaborate with others, produce and share original content, and use the Internet and technology tools to achieve many academic, professional, and personal goals (“Enhancing Digital Literacies” NYC Schools Department, quoted in Murphy, 2014).

This definition places an emphasis on the ability to find, connect, collaborate, consume and produce digital content and as such is wider ranging than the definition provided by Gilster, in 1997. This definition outlines both the challenges and opportunities for arts managers in an increasingly digital age. The opportunity for authentic engagement with audiences, on an audiences own terms, through new platforms and media, provides a foundation for art form development, new audiences, and new stories to be told.

Arts managers can look to their colleagues in museums for support when it comes to developing new digitally relevant systems, processes, missions, and visions for their institutions. Museums, perhaps more so than, other, non collecting, arts institutions, have to date struggled with issues of authenticity, control and gate keeping. Writing in 2011 Robert Stein interviewed a series of museum innovators around what they saw was the challenges of digital culture. Across the research we see a number of familiar themes emerge. Ed Rodley, (the then) Associate Director of Integrated Media at Peabody Essex Museum, cites authority as a key concern ‘Participatory culture doesn’t do away with the need for authority, but it will privilege a different kind of authority, a more transparent, more engaged one’ (2012, p. 218) . While Nancy Proctor, (the then) Head of Mobile Strategy and Initiatives Smithsonian Institution, talks about the need to engage with participatory culture at the core of museum

practice, perhaps even radically changing the structure of museums institutions to be more relevant, because superficial ‘innovation’ means that museums are simply putting a new face on an old body. She advocates that museums must undertake ‘the much harder, less sexy, but ultimately more sustainable task of radically restructuring our museums and practices even as we work within those very institutions’ (2012, p. 222) Here we see two key themes emerging, namely authorial control and superficial change. Stein sums up this dilemma well by asking ‘whether or not we are ready to do the hard work of authentic engagement? Or, are we instead seeking the ‘quick-hit’ payoffs to be gleaned from the current crop of cultural fads?’ (2012, p. 221)

Leadership is of course key to the success of arts institutions responding to and indeed thriving within this new technological and cultural landscape. The autocratic, top down approach of leadership by a ‘charismatic leader’ as observed as being prevalent by Nesbitt and Walmsley, sits in contradiction to the participatory ideals of web 2.0 (Nisbett and Walmsley, 2016). The complexity of designing systems and structures that enable authentic participation across all segments of an organisation is not lost on the creator of the World Wide Web, Berners-Lee

I had (and still have) a dream that the web could be less of a television channel and more of an interactive sea of shared knowledge... I imagine it immersing us in a warm, friendly environment made of things we and are friends have seen, heard, believe or have figured out (Tim Berners-Lee quoted in Rosen, 2012, p. 111) .

Whilst the web has not always been the friendliest of places, the vision proposed by Berners-Lee offers an useful vision for the contemporary arts manager, a vision that somewhat contradicts the charismatic leadership model that has become prevalent across the sector. Caust argues that ‘Models of leadership that have been associated with the arts historically may no longer have any validity in a post-modern world. Likewise, structures and organizational models of the past may no longer have relevance in the twenty-first century’ (Caust, 2017, p. xi).

In the preface to his 2012 book *What you really Need to Know about the Internet*, Naughton outlines the force at which this ‘new’ media ecosystems demands organisational and institutional change.

Our new media ecosystem is immeasurably more complex than the one in which most of us were educated and conditioned. Yet complexity is something that we have traditionally tried to ignore or control. Since denial and control are no longer options, we need to tool up for the challenge. In particular, we need to pay attention to how complex systems work, and to how our organisations need to be reshaped to make them cope with the complexity that now confronts them (Naughton, 2012, p. 5).

In a crowded media and content landscape, the quality of stories, content and art form becomes even more important, and arguably that quality will come from culturally relevant dialogue influenced in part by digital culture. Glocer argues that ‘If you want to attract a community around you, you must offer them something original and of a quality that they can react to and incorporate in their creative work’ (Tom Glocer

quoted in Rosen, 2012, p. 15). Creative work is not confined to professional 'creatives' but in a digital age, everyone is a creative producer, a publisher and distributor from Facebook posts, to YouTube videos. Creative production and knowledge distribution has been changed forever by Web 2.0 technologies.

Web 2.0 and collaborative ideals

Leadbeater argues that one outcome of web 2.0 technologies impact on wider society is that there is a notable cultural shift away from things being done for us towards a new model of things being done with us. Describing how the age old rhetoric of politicians working 'for us' is being cast aside by a new rhetoric of 'we did this together' (Leadbeater, 2009). This new ethos, which is being facilitated by Web 2.0 is already breeding new kinds of organisations from NetMums to Wikipedia, these organisations gain social capital not from the expertise of core voices, but from the diversity and multiplicity of voices that create content for them. Social capital, is a term used to mirror financial capital, however social connections replace money in this system of capital (Gauntlett, 2011, p. 129). Although there are a number of writers who have sought to define social capital (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2001) it is Pierre Bourdieu's three-tiered model that provides us with the clearest insight into the complexities of capital within contemporary society (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu defines capital as having three components: cultural, social and economic. Cultural Capital refers to formal knowledge, education and an appreciation of high culture from opera to the fine arts. Social capital is based on one's network of friends, allies and associates, while economic capital is based on financial assets. In an increasingly networked world social capital has increasing importance for cultural organisations. Leadbeater suggests that arts organisations need to facilitate this new ethos, and

respond to the new modes of creation and engagement that Web 2.0 is prompting audiences to expect. In examining why people want to contribute to arts organisations he explains the intrinsic drive to seek ‘the satisfaction of solving a puzzle’ (Leadbeater, 2009).

Inviting people in is not as simple as opening the doors – Leadbeater points out that if that was the case ‘Starbucks could claim to be the World’s leading art business’ (Leadbeater, 2009, p. 10). The challenge is to create an open culture, and work with diverse voices rather than simply a ‘self appointed guild of geeks’. By only working with those who have advanced digital skills, and thus social capital would replicate the power hierarchies of old and thus defeat the spirit of ‘with’ that Web 2.0 technologies have spawned.

Fleming also notes the move towards porous organisational structures in *Embracing the Desire Lines – Opening up Cultural Infrastructure* (2009). This move towards open and porous cultural organisations is a radical affront to these traditional temples of power, those grand Victorian buildings that ‘for so long have stood steadfast as examples as symbols of cultural continuity and comfort’ (Fleming, 2009, p. 1). For him the need to become more open and porous is centred on the issue of relevance, cultural organisations need to appeal to the public if they are to survive. In a broad sweep he cites approaches ranging from ‘co-commissioning and co-curating, connecting the knowledge, content and tastes of different communities’ and suggests that this should happen throughout the institution both onsite and online (Fleming, 2009, p. 13). However again we are reminded that openness, partnership and

collaboration in any form is not easy ‘to open the doors a little wider is to encourage vulnerability as much as innovation and opportunity’ (Fleming, 2009, p. 20).

Govier also makes the link between the challenge facing museums and cultural organisations in *Leaders in Co-Creation? Why and How Museums Could Develop their Co-Creative Practice with the Public, Building on Ideas from the Performing Arts and Other Non Museum Organisations* (Govier, 2009a). In this report Govier suggests that focusing the co-creation debate on ‘power’ is a bit of a red herring, she suggests that museums are never going to relinquish all power to visitors so it is more beneficial to move the debate beyond one of democracy versus elitism and towards an enquiry into how museums and their visitors can work together. ‘In tough economic times, we need to be relevant for and connected to our publics: letting them contribute to our future development makes sense on so many levels economic as well as ideological’ (Govier, 2009b, p. 5).

It is perhaps useful with reference to this quote to briefly revisit Gunatillake, as he also places the same emphasis on the importance of innovation: ‘innovation is sometimes presented as a desirable extra, something that organisations might do when they have some spare cash...innovation is much more basic than this: it is the condition for survival in a changing environment’ (Gunatillake, 2008). In concluding her review of case studies and literature Govier states that ‘the best collaborative work happens within a framework and that it does need management and leadership. You need to plan, design and reflect for effective collaboration’ (Govier, 2009b, p. 17).

Simon notes how Web 2.0 technologies have ousted traditional knowledge structures, with users seeking reviews, opinions and comments from other, often-anonymous Web 2.0 users, rather than from traditional ‘experts’. When buying online we read reviews and make purchasing decisions based on the content provided by other users, rather than solely the ‘expert’ reviews in a newspaper or on the sleeve of a book. Simon expresses the value of responding to the challenges posed by this new landscape through a helpful anecdote:

Consider the experience of cooking with a child. Under no circumstances is it easier or faster to bake a cake with an eight-year-old than to do it yourself.

However including the child builds your relationship with him, empowers him as a maker, and teaches him some basic cooking, scientific and mathematical concepts. And it produces a cake for everyone to enjoy (Simon, 2010, p. 14).

The value of stakeholders be they audience, visitor or patron is something that occurs in multiple studies (insert links), however a key challenge that also emerges centres on the authenticity of such practices (insert links). The Open Stage Project, initiated by The Theatre Royal Stratford East (TRSE), tested the concept of sustained engagement, as a means to give up power and sharing it with ‘people who want to come along to the party’; the project blurb describes dialogue as a founding principle of the project.

‘The Open Stage project is dedicated to democratizing theatre, to listening to the voices and stories of those in the community who are not often heard, and to building a sense of empowerment and ownership of the theatre by the local community’.

In order to truly open the gates, TRSE were required to relinquish their role as gatekeepers, and consciously reflect upon the need to alter the status quo, and move beyond 'policing the boundaries of taste'. Rather than developing an audience for existing work, this project sought to look beyond the parameters of the organisations own understanding of theatre, and provide space, permission, and authority to ideas developed outside the organisation.

For many years now arts institutions have sought to develop new audiences, to bring the people to them, to educate and help non attenders understand art forms. However web 2.0 technologies have created a new phenomenon, with citizens asserting their rightful place amongst art forms and institutions in which they are not represented. In parallel to arts organisations gingerly opening the gates, through specific audience development programmes, we have seen social media serve as a platform to galvanise self organising audiences, who have stood up and staked a claim on arts organisations.

Bhaskar describes the traditional model of arts production as the 'broadcast model', and argues that this linear approach has begun to give way to a 'consumer-curated model' (2017, p. 207). This is, in part due to an increasingly mass media, 24/7, always on cultural landscape which means that for many push notifications, and subscription services deliver a constant feed of culture via the mobile devices in their pockets (Boyd, 2012). Today we are experiencing a cultural overload on a daily basis, with more 'content' than ever before, 'the power to decide who watches what and when has flipped from broadcasters to audience' (Bhaskar, 2017, p. 208). This has resulted in two major shifts of audience – institution dialogue.

Firstly we see arts organisations embracing web 2.0 technologies and culture as a means to tell the stories of the day, and in doing so, are creating a dialogue with new and often more diverse audiences.

Secondly we see audiences stepping up and claiming space within arts organisations in which they do not feel represented, an approach that can be both challenging and enriching.

Embracing web 2.0 | x | claiming space

An early example of an organisation gaining the rewards of entering bravely into the unknown, by applying the principles of web 2.0 culture to their physical space, in 2012, was Walker Art Centre. *Open Field* was a three year long project developed by Walker to challenge established ideas about what art and participation could look like. The project invited anyone (i.e. not just artists) to propose an activity, which would then take place on the lawn of their building with the least mediation possible. In an introduction to a book published as part of this project Sarah Schultz and Sarah Peters from Walker Art Centre, explain *Open Field*'s underlying principles:

Grounded in the belief that creative agency is a requirement for sustaining a vital public and civic sphere, it nurtures the free exchange of ideas, experimentation and serendipitous interactions. Whether hosting a collective of artists building a schoolhouse, a pickling demonstration, or a raucous group of children rolling down a hill, *Open Field* attempts to break with a number of timeworn conventions about the role of museums, creativity and public life'.¹

¹ Sarah Schultz and Sarah Peters, "Introduction" in *Open Field: Conversations on the Commons* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Centre, 2011) p. 19.

This project is extreme in its openness and included activities as diverse as an Internet Cat Video Festival (Burgess, 2015), and a workshop called ‘Car Theft for Kids’ (which taught kids how to break into cars, and out of cars – should they find themselves in a hostage situation). It is an important project because it tested and pushed boundaries and moved beyond the superficial mode of participation described by Govier. In a publication associated with this project, Ippolito notes:

It’s a lot easier for museums to give lip service to the commons than to tear down the stanchions keeping the mummies and Monet’s at arm’s length. Yet museums must question their identity as gatekeeper, whether of the zookeeper or cashier variety, if they are to remain relevant in the age of the remix (Ippolito, 2012)

This project used four guidelines and twelve rules to guide participation, these rules which sought to scaffold experience (for example encourage people to participate) but discourage reckless or dangerous behaviour were heavily debated within the museum. In a chapter called “When Bad Things Don’t Happen” Peters reflects on the development journey within the museum, and the positive outcomes of the project (hence the chapter the title) (Peters, 2012). This projects value is drawn from its imperfections, it was diverse and eclectic, at times unrefined. It was the polar opposite of a curated exhibition with associated branding, but it was this imperfection, and critical praxis that created a valuable dialogue about the role and purpose of Walker, a dialogue that happened not within the walls of the museum, but instead on its front

lawn for all to see. Embracing the creative journey provides room for real dialogue to occur between those within the institution and those outside (Murphy, 2016).

The importance of dialogue is something that is echoed by Fuel Theatre Companies, Theatre Club, a concept that sits on the periphery of an organization, and seeks to provide a safe space for outside voices. The concept for Theatre Club, was derived from *Dialogue*, an event developed by Maddy Costa and Jake Orr. *Dialogue* was created as a platform to invite audiences to discuss the work they had just seen in a welcoming and unpretentious environment. The key to *Dialogue* is that no one from the production attends the group, allowing audience members to lead and reflect on the production, steering the conversation towards their own experience. This format gives agency to the audience, and values their own lived experience as a respected contribution to interpreting work. It is a social media chat in real life. As Costa explains:

‘Theatre is a communal activity, and sometimes the best fun in seeing a show is chatting about it afterwards in the bar or on the journey home. But what if you’re in the sizeable minority of people who go to the theatre alone, aren’t part of a theatre-making community, and don’t have anyone with whom to share their opinions?’ (Maddy Costa quoted in *Theatre Club Handbook: New Conversations About Theatre*, n.d.)

Criticism is at the heart of Costas work, having worked as a critic at a national newspaper, she was approached by theatre maker Chris Goode to engage in a period of ‘embedded criticism’ with the work of his, at the time, new company. The brief for what this might look like, and the rationale behind it, is spelt out in an email from

Goode to Costa.

‘A cross between a dramaturg, an archivist, a documentary artist, and outreach officer, a brand manager and Jiminy Cricket. Someone whose job it is to remind us what we do, to explain to others who we are, to have a long memory, to relate that memory to the present instant and to what seems likely to happen tomorrow.... Not just an outside eye (and ear) but also a memory, a conscience, a nagging voice. A heart’ (Chris Goode quoted in Costa, 2016, p. 201).

More than a dialogue between two, this email, now published in a book chapter by Costa in which she explores *The Critic as Insider*, provides a helpful foundation from which to reimagine the role of the audience, to that of a vocal, active and critical participant. This email, serves as perhaps a provocative, perhaps aspirational, but nonetheless instructive manifesto for what a critically engaged, digitally minded, contemporary audience might look like.

For Damian Martin, Costa’s work, and *Dialogue* more specifically represents a wider shift towards new forms of theatre criticism, including critics being invited to sit in writer’s rooms or be embedded in an arts organization. However Martin also outlines how criticism has followed the academic trend of moving outside the ivory tower, ‘The effect of these changes has been a looser boundary between the academy and the public arena, with distinctions less clearly demarcated’ (Damian Martin, 2016, p. 199).

The *Black Ticket Project* (BTP), has many similar traits, in terms of opening up new

dialogue, and creating new approaches to platforming audience experience however it began outside the organization to which it speaks. Tobi Kyeremateng created the *Black Ticket Project*, in 2017, as a means for herself, and other People of Colour working in theatre to support people from their own community to attend culturally relevant theatre for the first time. Their first campaign supported people to attend *Barber Shop Chronicles* at the National Theatre, a work written by a black playwright, and a performed by a racially diverse cast. Kyeremateng, a theatre producer, realized that whilst this work told a story that she and her friends could relate to, many of her friends felt that booking a ticket for the National Theatre was a big risk. The show became a sellout success, and the result was that by the time, many of those whose story was being told on stage grew the confidence to purchase tickets, only the most expensive were available. This was a major problem for Kyeremateng, who notes that ‘Despite the international success of Barber Shop Chronicles, it felt like something was missing in the audience development of the show’(Kyeremateng quoted in “Black Theatre Live,” 2018) . As such BTP began as a radical intervention to the work of a national institution, the National Theatre London.

Whilst audience development work often centres on providing affordable ticketing, BTP was able to go further in that it questioned traditional power structures from the perspective of those that do not attend. Kyeremateng argues that arts organisations need to go further than simply programming ‘diverse’ work. ‘Programming 'diverse'...work is only one leg of bringing in 'diverse' audiences. A very important feat, but also think venues underestimate how much trust-building is involved in inviting in people you've alienated throughout your history’(Kyeremateng, 2018). In the spirit of web 2.0, BTP was a project created completely independently of the organization it spoke to, The National Theatre. It challenged traditional cultural

capital power structures, and through social media empowered social capital, the knowledge of ones own culture, connections and narrative, as a valuable and important new approach to defining what an audience for a national theatre could be. BTP was work that Kyeremateng and her peers felt needed to be done, and rather than waiting on an institution to do it, they began a community campaign and through a crowdfunding campaign raised funds for 30 tickets. More than simply a ticket project, this scheme seeks to empower young black people to not only attend, but to enjoy, and perhaps, even 'own' their experience. When young people attend an event with the BTP they are met by a volunteer facilitator who works with the project, and are welcomed into the venue and supported through the rules of theatre, 'Accessing theatre isn't just about what you see, but also how you experience a venue once you're inside. The journey starts from your front door to your theatre seat' ("Black Ticket Project is creating opportunities for young Black people to access theatre. | Patreon," n.d.) . Kyeremateng explained that not being able to go back to your seat if you go to the toilet, or sitting in the front row for a show, or not being permitted to bring a drink into the auditorium can all be confrontational experiences for the uninitiated. Since it began BTP has grown in its remit and has begun to partner with theatres (although still maintains its position as a critical outsider), this alongside repeated crowdfunding campaigns has led to 1000 tickets being made available for young black people to attend culturally relevant, exciting, and engaging theatre. Having operated completely independently to send young people to the *Barber Shop Chronicles*, at the National Theatre for their first project, BTP have now partnered with the National Theatre. This has resulted in National Theatre providing a quota of complementary tickets for their production of *Nine Nights* in 2018. The National Theatre also block booked additional tickets which were offered at a discount rate and thanks to a crowdfunding

campaign by BTP offered free at point of use to participants.

Both Open Field, and Dialogue demonstrate ways that arts organisations are ‘opening the gates’ and creating new platforms for participation, exchange, storytelling and programming. BTP provides a more radical example of how underrepresented audiences are kicking open the gates, and claiming space. However what unites the three projects, is that whilst different in their institutional relationship, they all seek to empower audiences, and reassert the value, relevance and importance of the arts within a mass media, content saturated world. As Kyeremateng asserts 'It’s important for young black people to know that this form of art exists and that they can reference it at some point' (Kyeremateng quoted in Akpan, 2018) . It is perhaps fair to say that whilst web 2.0 technologies, and the cultures they have spawned have created many challenges for arts organisations, they have also provided new power structures, that present the possibility of welcoming more diverse voices in, not to simply attend a performance, or visit an exhibition, but to claim space and take ownership of their national institutions.

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