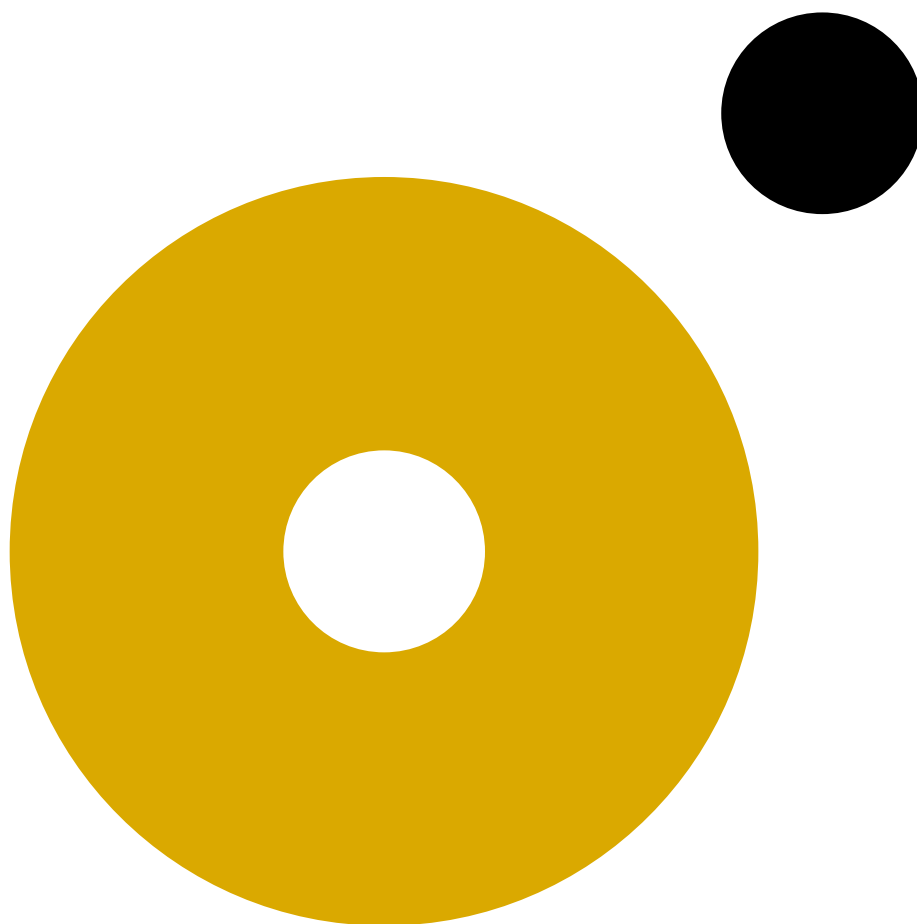


MEMORIA **SCOLASTICA**



The School and Its Many Pasts

edited by Juri Meda, Lucia Paciaroni and Roberto Sani



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School as Seen by the Radio (1945-1975)

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1. *The first relations between radio and school*

In Italy, the first distance learning experiences were produced by state radio. The latter experienced its first development in the Fascist twenties, in particular from 1924, with the birth of the Ministry of Communications, entrusted to Costanzo Ciano¹. The latter boasted relations with Guglielmo Marconi and with his advisor, Solari, one of the very earliest fascists. On 27 August 1924, the minister's mediation enabled the establishment of the *Unione Radiofonica Italiana* (URI), from the merger of the *Radiofono* of the Marconi group and the *Società Italiana Radio Audizioni Circolari* (SIRAC)². From January 1925, the weekly "Radio Hour", the official organ of the URI, published all the hours of radio broadcasts receivable. From the summer of 1926, the URI was commissioned to produce short programmes for collective listening, to be broadcast in the venues of recreational societies and in the meeting places of the Opera Nazionale Balilla.

On 25 December 1926, Elisabetta Oddone, a primary school teacher, lent her voice for the first time to a radio programme for children, broadcast from the headquarters in Milan and entitled *Il cantuccio degli bambini*. The following year, the URI changed its acronym to EIAR, *Ente Italiano per le Audizioni Radiofoniche* (Italian Body for Radio Listening)³, and in 1930 it started the new official press organ called «Radiocorriere». In 1933, EIAR followed the message expressed explicitly by Mussolini: «Every village must have its own radio»; and if each city had to have its own radio listening apparatus, schools were immediately identified as particularly suitable venues for the purpose of spreading fascist ideology: these were places that were present in a large part of the territory and above all were the recognised bodies for the education of the younger generations.

In 1934, there were 900.000 radio listeners in Italy, the devices were present in very limited numbers and, based on the mandatory possession fee, there were 350.000 subscribers, with large disproportions in the presence of devices between the north and south of the country⁴. At the time of the 1936 census, the resident Italian population was estimated at about 42 million people⁵. The decision to spread economic models that were capable of entering the greatest number of places frequented by Italians, such as Radio

¹ C. Ciano, *Le comunicazioni nel primo decennio fascista*, Milano, Mondadori, 1932.

² F. Monteleone, *Storia della radio e della televisione in Italia*, Venezia, Marsilio, 1999.

³ RAI, *Annuario RAI 1988/1989*, Torino, Nuova ERI, 1989.

⁴ P. Ortoleva, B. Scaramucci (edd.), *Enciclopedia della Radio*, Milano, Garzanti, 2003.

⁵ ISTAT, VIII Censimento generale della popolazione, Roma, 1937.

Rurale (produced since 1933) and Radio Balilla (produced in 1937), signalled the well-defined objective of using the new media as a propaganda tool. The device called Radio Rurale was intended for public bodies and for schools in particular, while Radio Balilla was later designed for the homes of private citizens. Consider that in 1939 the EIAR reached one million subscribers (0.4% of the population), but in the European context, the Italian data were far from the 13 million subscribers in Germany (9%) and the 9 million in Great Britain (4%). The diffusion of rural radio in a thorough way with respect to the orders received began in February 1934 and the recording of deliveries concerned in particular schools and institutions of the regime: the apparatuses were often delivered free of charge to primary schools, to the offices of the *Opera Nazionale Balilla* and those of the fascist party, the directors of educational institutions, school inspectors, rural parishes, rural offices of the national recreational centre, to the itinerant agriculture chairs, to the offices of the Fascist agricultural trade union confederation and to those of the farmers' confederation. The gifts were the result of the financial commitment of banks, insurers and private citizens who reported in this way their participation in the purposes indicated by the party. In 1934, there were 4.123 devices in operation: 1.405 at the organisations of the regime and 2.718 in primary schools. In 1938, the data indicated 16.418 devices delivered to the institutional headquarters of the regime and 23.945 to primary schools. The use of radio for educational purposes allowed schools to be exempted from paying the subscription fee.

In April 1934, the transmissions of the *Ente Radio Rurale* [Rural Radio Authority] began with the aim of spreading fascist culture widely within primary schools. This ambitious project with a strongly ideological focus was supported by the Rural Radio Authority, the Ministry of National Education, the Fascist Party and the Ministry of Communications. Francesco Ercole, the Minister of Education, had sought to assert his competences by setting up a committee for the preparation of the programmes which included the educational superintendent for the Lazio region, an Inspector of the Ministry of Education and the Director of the EIAR.

In a speech that Mussolini had given for the inauguration of the congress of the school corporation in 1925, the objectives that guided the activity of the Rural Radio Authority had already been expressed:

[It] is required that the whole school in all its classes and in all its teachings educate the Italian youth to understand Fascism, to renew themselves in Fascism and to live in the historical climate created by the Fascist revolution.

In 1934, radio became the chosen tool to spread the voice of the regime widely, especially in places of training and education that were located far from the main communication routes.

Listening to the broadcasts provided a rigid methodology: the teacher prepared the class to listen also thanks to «Radiocorriere», which provided the worksheets with the themes that would be covered on the various occasions of collective listening, then the group of students were prepared to listen passively to radio messages of thirty minutes'

duration composed of hymns, music and messages from Mussolini; finally, the activity ended with tasks to be carried out on the theme presented in the programme.

The final papers often consisted of comments written by the students and some of them were sent to the editorial staff of «Radiocorriere» to be published in the following weeks. Some of the first writings proposed by the official press organ of the EIAR date back to 1933, the year of the two experimental broadcasts carried out on 19 April and 30 May, with the obvious aim of underlining the ability of the radio to bring to peripheral places and those areas that were less connected with cities, the image of a kind of progress that in the broadcasts corresponded to insistent propaganda, linked to the words of the *Duce* «addressed to students, farmers and their children»:

Letter from the children of the rural school of Vidiana-Parma

We are few students of a small rural school located in the hills of Emilia. None of the beautiful and lively things that delight the children of Italy reach us up here, and we must make do with what the teacher tells us. Yesterday, however, we experienced a stroke of luck: without you knowing, you who do not even imagine our existence, we too rushed to the invitation you extended to all the children of Italy, to listen to your wonderful voice delivering all the most beautiful and dearest hymns. You can't imagine how much wonder and joy we felt for the first time⁶.

On the same occasion of the experimental broadcasts of 1933, «Radiocorriere» also included the evaluations of an educational director and also in this case the words insisted on the need to follow up on the experience of radio in school:

Letter from the educational director of Vigevano

An hour after the students of my school left the gyms, where I had set up the radio sets and where we listened to the transmission for the schools, commotion still dominated. I do not know: I felt tears in my eyes and I also saw some of my teachers who were trying to hide an emotion that was stronger than their will. The experiment was successful and we, school men, ask that you do not remain isolated. Radio in schools has many possibilities and a long way to go. In this hour, our children experienced the most pulsating feeling of the Homeland, they felt close to their brothers and their sisters in other schools, those in the small, remote schools of the mountains and the countryside: they felt united on the same path, almost as if they were all a part of the same family, and they were moved⁷.

In the following years of broadcasting for schools, the written accounts of the students continued to express the utmost enthusiasm for listening to rural radio broadcasts:

Today, we heard the last radio transmission of choral singing that closed the programme of the year 1938. The radio broadcaster told us that, at that time, more than 3 million schoolchildren were gathered around the Radio, and told us that the *Duce's* two children, Anna Maria and Romano Mussolini, were also among the children who were singing. At this revelation, applause broke out and waves of clapping engulfed the classroom where we were gathered and cheers were heard honouring the two illustrious schoolchildren. The radio broadcast began with the song of the Royal March and Youth and a new song entitled *Moschetto e vanga* [Musket and Spade]. Oh! If only I could sing like that⁸.

⁶ «Radiocorriere», n. 11, 1933, p. 14.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Written work by the student Elvina Manfreda of the fifth class of the Gorizia primary school, dated 30

Some pamphlets published by the Rural Radio Authority in 1938 clarified the connections perceived by fascism between schools and the agricultural world, considered essential for autarchy:

Our rural radio, unlike all the others, is inspired by a unitary conception that embraces both school and agricultural spheres, considering one as a complement and preparation for the other. Both school and agricultural radio are also not a summarily controlled initiative of private radio bodies, but the prerogative and responsibility of a state body, officially created, qualified and financed by the state and operating with eminently political purposes and responsibilities⁹.

It was precisely the attempt to connect instruction, education and agricultural work that appeared to be the most interesting aspect of the experiment described, on which, however, the push from ideology weighed at all costs.

Since 1935, the war in Ethiopia had meanwhile taken hold in all the programming for primary school and one of the tasks planned for the students in listening, had become that of constantly updating the Italian conquests in Africa by placing flags on the map. The experiences of war fought progressively on several fronts until Italy's entry into the war in June 1940 laid bare the shortcomings of Italian broadcasting. In the context of the war, the radio became an even more useful tool for information and the secretariat of the Duce began to be flooded with communications from rural headquarters of the party that complained of being totally cut off from broadcasting over the air. More than half of the Italian territory was without receivers and despite the attempt to produce more sophisticated and efficient models at low cost, from Radio Balilla to Radio Roma, many schools and institutions had not had the opportunity to receive them, because the industries had not detected any real interest in production: the costs remained high and the number of devices was inadequate¹⁰.

Between the end of 1942 and the beginning of 1943, Italian schools were finally forced to close due to the Second World War and Giuseppe Bottai, the Minister of National Education who was responsible for the educational programming of EIAR, advocated for the beginning of radio programming that was no longer to be understood as complementary to, but as a substitute for school:

Imagine a boat without oars. It would be tossed here and there by the waves or the wind. The teacher can build the boat, but you have to build the oars... Well, you have already understood, the oars are, precisely, attention. But there is no need to worry because the boys of 1942 are capable people: are you not, perhaps, the sons, brothers, relatives and friends of the soldiers who are fighting so bravely on various fronts?¹¹

May 1938, housed in the "School Materials" fund of the historical archive of the INDIRE within which there are 18 copybooks with activities carried out in relation to listening to the programming of radio broadcasts for schools.

⁹ *L'ora dell'agricoltura, strumento dell'autarchia*, Roma, Ente Radio Rurale, 1938, p.10.

¹⁰ F. Monteleone, *La radio italiana nel periodo fascista. Studi e documenti: 1922-1945*, Venezia, Marsilio, 1976.

¹¹ G. Isola, *Abbassa la tua radio per favore*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1990, p. 56.

The radio broadcast was minimal and of course the supposed distance school was not met with any possibility for popular following. Meanwhile, the armistice of September 1943 also caused the transfer of the headquarters of the EIAR from Rome to Milan and its transformation into the radio of the Italian Social Republic.

2. *The new radio for schools*

On 22 October 1946, Guido Gonella, Minister of Public Education, announced on the radio the beginning of the new school year. It was also the sign of the recovery of social life after the world war and in his speech he emphasised the need to use radio broadcasts to combat illiteracy. By 1944, the EIAR had changed its acronym to Rai, *Radio Audizioni Italiane*. A programme called *La radio per le scuole* (Radio for Schools) was already broadcast and continued its broadcasts until the mid-1970s. Once again, state radio programming identified the training and education segment as a fundamental reference for public service and again the construction of student-oriented programming took place in close cooperation with the Ministry of Public Education. The broadcasts included the involvement of an advisory committee composed, as far as the Rai was concerned, of the president, the advisor, the delegate and the general director and, as far as the Ministry was concerned, of the heads of the student broadcasts, the general director for primary education, for classical, scientific and master's education, assisted by experts on school-related issues. If the radio of the fascist regime had been an instrument of ideological diffusion, the "Radio for Schools" assumed the traits of a path towards the reconstruction of democratic culture. The programmes could be listened to every 15 days inside the classrooms of the institutes (if equipped to do so) according to a schedule that was communicated to the schools and also broadcast on «Radiocorriere». The most innovative part of that experience of radio lessons was the direct relationship that the young primary students could establish with directors, authors and actors of the Rai. The many programmes made by *La Radio per le Scuole* were broadcast from Monday to Saturday, played again in the morning and afternoon, accompanied by interviews with actors and cultural figures and with the participation of the theatre companies of Rome, Turin, Milan, Florence and Trieste. These were stable theatrical companies constituted by the Rai made up of well-known actresses and actors, as well as young and promising talent gaining initial work experience.

The programmes were of various kinds: literary, musical, historical, geographical, religious, pedagogical, scientific and folkloric, and took place from early November to mid-May. Most of the fairy tales and stories that were offered through the radio programmes aimed at schools were works based on a model that was soon renamed "prose for radio" or "radio drama". This narrative choice enabled the creation of empathy in children when listening, but it also offered an introduction to theatrical language and was a useful pedagogical medium that was also enjoyed by adults. Alongside the theatre, space had been allocated for the radio transposition of literary works read by great actors or writers:



Fig. 1. Cover of the magazine «La radio per le scuole», n. 1-2, 1958



Fig. 2. Inauguration of the school-radio year in Catania («La radio per le scuole», n. 1, 1962, p. 5)

the radio format would inspire, a few years later, the first television experiments related to the cultural field. One aspect of particular interest is the group of experts who supported the Rai and the Ministry of Public Education in this radio education experience. In 1951, the teacher Alberto Manzi won a radio prize for a children's story presented on Rai. From that moment, he established a constant collaboration with the "Radio for Schools" which then translated into his best-known television programme *Non è mai troppo tardi* [It is never too late]. Alongside Manzi, there were other figures from the world of teaching who collaborated with this radio project connected to the school environment, such as Giacomo Cives and Bruno Munari. It was a first step for the renewal of Rai that would then take place in the subsequent experience of pedagogical television, linked to Rai's recruitment of personalities such as Umberto Eco, Furio Colombo, Gianni Vattimo, Enrico Vaime and Piero Angela, Tullio de Mauro and Sergio Zavoli, accompanied by young university professors such as Antonio Santoni Rugiu, Luigi Silori and Leone Piccioni. Each of them had previously had more or less ongoing collaborations with radio for schools¹². Since July 2020, the Rai's *Teche* have made available 66 broadcasts of "Radio for Schools" and collected the testimonies of those who participated in that

¹² G. Gozzini, *La mutazione individualista*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2014.

era of culture. The transmission ended definitively in the mid-1970s¹³. In 1950, it was Antonio Santoni Rugiu, after numerous experiences of radio dramas prepared for Rai, who proposed a critical analysis of the school project through radio:

[School by radio] can work well, but only as a supplement to the teacher's work¹⁴.

This was the careful reflection of a scholar who had also trained himself through "doing radio" and was therefore aware that the teacher had to be "the conductor" of a teaching form that was in the process of renewal, and that they could not rely merely on the novelty of the media available. In any case, an opening to the outside was being established, mediated by high-quality radio that involved directors, authors, actors, teachers, pedagogues and psychologists and that brought a new communicative language to classrooms. This was also specified by Antonio Segni who, in a speech made in 1951, stated as Minister of Public Education:

Radio broadcasts for schools are certainly of undeniable utility and are an excellent means of supporting the irreplaceable role of the teacher, especially in smaller town centres and isolated locations¹⁵.

The official nature of this remote experience was marked by the opening and closing ceremonies of each radio school year and, between these two dates, the broadcasts that were aired all opened remembering the saint of the day.

The post-war broadcasts were often focused on the construction of the new democratic identity of the country: "The songs of the tricolour" and "Visit to the Quirinale" were thus played, but the programming also included stories and fairy tales adapted to radio reading and addressed to the different ages of the students listening, such as "Brave men", "Friends of humanity", "Modern narrators" and "The wonderful rose tree". Santoni Rugiu himself added in a 2011 interview with Rodolfo Sacchetti:



Fig. 3. The radio team arrives in schools («La radio per le scuole», n. 1, 1955, p. 6)

¹³ The 66 songs offered online by *Teche Rai* are available at the following link: <https://www.raiplayradio.it/playlist/2019/03/La-Radio-per-le-Scuole-5606135c-0058-4c77-a0de-0d7f99a9a1c4.html> (last access: 20.03.2021).

¹⁴ A. Santoni Rugiu, *Si e no della Radioscuola*, «Radioquadrante», n. 1, 1950, p. 10.

¹⁵ «La radio per le scuole», n. 1, 1950, p. 2.

Of that [radio] experience, I tried to bring something into the school environment as well. My belief was that the teacher had to also be, in a sense, a “theatrical director” in building relationships with students and with the contents of the teaching¹⁶.

In the mid-1970s, the “Radio for Schools” project ended, because the use of media had changed profoundly, but above all due to the appearance of television in the lifestyles and habits of Italians. Television has proved to be the medium that has most influenced and compelled the transition of Italy from a rural country to an industrialised society. The approach taken by the first educational television, aimed at defeating illiteracy, gradually also transformed the radio broadcasts of the sixties and seventies, but a social change was also underway that imposed new choices in the national media system¹⁷. Radio as a public service was not defeated by the rivalry that television represented, but rather was changed profoundly. In the first decade of state television, Rai radio had retained a greater circulation and daily use than that of television, but in 1968 Tullio De Mauro defined the Italian language used in radio at that stage as flat and removed from everyday language¹⁸. There is another interesting fact that the linguist highlighted: before the advent of television, despite the commitment to the dissemination of the Italian language through radio, two out of three Italians still used dialect for both public and private communication. The advent of television reversed this proportion within a few decades. The particular period in which the co-presence of television next to radio began and stabilised, between the sixties and seventies, saw the emergence of the reference figure of Leone Piccioni, who had been deputy general director of Rai since 1969, but responsible for radio programmes until that year. It was Piccioni, a man of deep literary culture, who represented the top figure of reference for the renewal of state radio programming. The choice for radio was to compile broadcasts aimed at a specific audience, while in those same years television was directed towards a more general and less sectoral audience. Cultural broadcasts did not disappear from radio, but instead became shorter. After 1975, the company’s interest in what we could define as pedagogical radio, understood in the strictest sense of the term, that is, that specifically addressed to didactic training and schools, ceased. The audience also changed, because the surrounding society changed, but the choices made for Radio Rai, which were more related to entertainment and music, did not prove to be a total *debacle* from a cultural point of view¹⁹. Rai radio, with its three channels, became a space in which to try to communicate outside the pre-established schemes, but in a way that was also more scholarly than what was offered by television: the singer Mina became the companion to a more highbrow approach to listening to music through the Sunday programme *Pomeriggio con Mina* [Afternoon with Mina], while *Il quarto d’ora del romanzo sceneggiato* [A fifteen-minute scripted novel] or *La commedia in trenta minuti* [A comedy in thirty minutes], were aimed in particular at

¹⁶ R. Sacchetti, *Scrittori alla radio*, Firenze, FUP, 2018, p. 74.

¹⁷ U. Eco, *Storia della televisione in Italia*, Roma, Carocci, 2014.

¹⁸ T. De Mauro, *Lingua parlata e TV*, in F. Alberoni *et alii*, *Televisione e vita italiana*, Torino, ERI, 1968, pp. 245-294.

¹⁹ Monteleone, *Storia della radio e della televisione in Italia*, cit.

housewives listening on weekday mornings, but still offered a clear reference to theatre and radio dramas. Consideration of young audiences was underlined by the success of programmes such as *Bandiera Gialla* [Yellow Flag] or *Per voi giovani* [For you young people] by Renzo Arbore. Certainly this was no longer the pedagogical radio that had been broadcast in schools, but it was precisely this more entertaining approach that allowed the radio medium to retain a specific role in the tastes of the new ruling class that was forming in those years and for whom radio still held attention for critical and informative functions, made even more compelling by the spread of portable radios and car radios that enabled that new entertainment medium to be brought along with listeners out of the home. The radio feature *La tribuna dei giovani* was an example of this new approach to the youth world: through music, the programme curved towards the discussion of generational themes in the present²⁰.

Radio certainly ended up to a lesser extent under the critical lens of the protest movements of the late sixties that instead described television as the main tool to replicate the hegemony of the ruling class. Radio Rai was able to elaborate some proposals that marked a minimum break with respect to television, including *Chiamate Roma 3131*, presented by Gianni Boncompagni and Franco Moccagatta and broadcast for the first time in 1969. The broadcast was a great success for the audience: three hours of conversations with listeners, by telephone, about their own stories and personal problems. The public decreed the same success also through its *high approval* of Boncompagni himself alongside Renzo Arbore, as well as for the *Interviste impossibili* that paved the way for the interview formula, which involved the participation of leading intellectuals and writers such as Eco, Sanguineti, Sciascia, or Calvino, who agreed to invent miraculous dialogues with illustrious characters of the past, often overcoming a certain backwardness for the media. However, Radio Rai certainly could not guarantee the flexibility necessary to fully respond to the demand for alternative information and counter-information and full freedom that the young generations began to bring forcefully to the streets and public opinion. In that cultural context of '68, it is evident that although innovative and built through the direct participation of the public, broadcasts were still subject to the strict control of the editorial staff.

That role of free expression demanded loudly by young people was instead sought in free radios that opened to an exchange in which, at least initially, there were no top figures, but instead a microphone that was open to the world and to new trends. The radio did not return to interact officially with schools, but instead continued a path that also implied an informal education project.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

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The School and Its Many Pasts

History is not memory; both, however, affect the way we perceive the past. In recent years, an increasing number of studies have focused on memory in order to critically analyze shared narratives of the past and their implications. Memory studies not only allow us to expand our knowledge about the past, but also help us to define the way in which today's people, social groups and public bodies look at it and interpret or re-interpret it. In this sense, school memory is not only of interest as a gateway to the school's past but also as a tool to understand what they know or believe they know about the school of the past and how much what they know corresponds to reality or is influenced by prejudices and stereotypes deeply rooted in common sense. These volumes aim to address these complex issues and broaden the perspective from which the schooling phenomenon is analyzed to better understand the school and its many pasts.

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