

Research Article | Araştırma Makalesi

# An Approach to Analytical Minimalism in Cinema: Il Buco (2021) Sinemada Analitik Minimalizme Bir Yaklaşım: Il Buco (2021)

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## Abstract

Minimalism has been seen as a movement in cinema based on simplification in terms of aesthetics and narrative. Minimalism in cinema is generally defined by diluted narrative elements, limited dialogues, long-shot sequences, and natural setting elements. Indeed, Yasujiro Ozu's minimalist approach in Japanese cinema has developed an aesthetic based on Zen philosophy, unlike Western art. Robert Bresson, on the other hand, has deepened the narrative by using non-visual elements and off-screen areas with metonymic minimalism. This study analyzes the use of Kovács's "analytical minimalism" theory adapted to the relevant film level, based on Michelangelo Frammartino's film *Il Buco* (2021) as the research object. *Il Buco* is constructed with long shots, slow camera movements, and natural sound design, while addressing the existential images of an old peasant in Calabria who continues his life with the cycle of death and life. In this study, the images of Frammartino's minimalist geometric cinematography, which he applied together with his transcendental approach, were analyzed around Kovács's "analytical minimalism" theory.

**Keywords:** Minimalism, Analytical Minimalism, *Il Buco*, Frammartino, Transcendental Approach.

## Öz

Minimalizm sinemada estetik ve anlatı açısından sadeleşmeye dayalı bir akım olarak görülmüştür. Sinemada minimalizm genellikle seyreltilmiş anlatı unsurları, kısıtlı diyaloglar, uzun plan sekanslar ile doğal mekân unsurlarıyla tanımlanmaktadır. Bu bağlamda yönetmenler minimalizmle karakterlerin içsel dünyalarını çevreleriyle etkileşim içinde yansıtma yoluna gitmişlerdir. Nitekim Yasujiro Ozu'nun Japon sinemasındaki minimalist yaklaşımı Batı sanatından farklı olarak Zen felsefesine dayalı bir estetik geliştirmiştir. Robert Bresson ise metonimik minimalizmle görsel olmayan unsurlarla ekran dışı alanları kullanarak anlatıyı derinleştirmiştir. Bu çalışma araştırma nesnesi olarak Michelangelo Frammartino'nun *Il Buco* (2021) filminden hareketle Kovács'ın "analitik minimalizm" teorisinin ilgili film düzeyine uyarlanan kullanımını analiz etmektedir. *Il Buco* uzun plan çekimler ve yavaş kamera hareketleri ile inşa edilirken ölüm ve yaşam döngüsüyle hayatını devam ettiren Calabria'daki yaşlı bir köylünün varoluşsal imgelerini ele almaktadır. Çalışmada Frammartino'nun transendental yaklaşımıyla birlikte uyguladığı minimalist düzeydeki geometrik sinematografisinin imgeleri Kovács'ın "analitik minimalizm" kuramı etrafında çözümlenmiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Minimalizm, Analitik Minimalizm, *Il Buco*, Frammartino.



## Introduction

It is seen that minimalism, which first came to the fore in the 1960s in the United States, emerged as a reaction to the pretentious styles of expression commonly used in various contemporary art forms, including cinema (Güleryüz, 2014, p. 2). Emerging as a reaction to the complex order and excess of contemporary art, minimalism touches upon simplicity on an objective level. This movement is based on the philosophy of reducing the elements of something with basic inferences. Indeed, the purity of expression in artistic forms manifests itself through the application of simple aesthetic narrative forms. In this context, various cinematic forms have been applied in the cinematic universe around the minimalist philosophy through simple film aesthetics. In principle, minimalism in cinema is generally characterized by reduced narrative elements, restricted dialogues, natural environments, framing and an emphasis on ambient sound (Yıldız Erol, 2023, p. 39).

The minimalist movement, which prefers the concrete and reality over the abstract, presents itself with the fewest figures. Films that adopt a minimalist approach generally show themselves with long takes and focusing on the details of daily life, while also increasing the audience's participation through contemplation rather than action (Antmen, 2013, p. 55). Films that were put into practice by directors such as Vittorio De Sica and Roberto Rossellini of the Italian Neorealism movement, where the camera went down to the streets and depicted simple daily situations in the films of that period Italy, can be considered the pioneers of the minimalist movement. Here, situations such as static camera movements, real light used, amateur acting, real locations and improvised dialogues are compatible with the minimalist narrative itself. Similarly, features such as the use of natural light and natural locations in films led by directors such as François Truffaut and Jean-Luc Godard in the French New Wave Movement can be seen as the conceptual pioneers of the minimalist cinema that would emerge in the 60s (Bondanella, 2001).

Directors such as Yasujiro Ozu, Kiarostami, Robert Bresson and Nuri Bilge Ceylan are the directors who represent the Minimalist cinema movement. The fact that these directors use long-shot-sequence shots and minimal camera movements in the context of minimalist cinema shows that they are representatives of this movement at the most basic level. However, the fact that the directors always prefer a minimalist form has also ensured that the cinematographic fame of these directors goes beyond the borders of their own countries (Özdoğan, 2004, p. 72).

Yasujiro Ozu, who shaped a minimalist style by blending especially serenity and slowness around Japanese culture with a transcendental style in Japanese cinema, was influenced by Zen in Japanese culture while doing this. It is seen that the technical possibilities of the camera are limited in accordance with a minimal style in the films of this director. In fact, the director does not prefer movements such as "zoom, drag, pan" in his films (Özdoğan, 2004, pp. 76-77). Ozu kneads his own cinematic art with Zen aesthetics and archetypes of Japanese culture. In fact, while doing this, Yasujiro Ozu also emphasizes the great differences between Eastern and Western understandings of art. This slow film aesthetic of the director generally goes beyond the imitative structure of Western art and thus defines a unique structural style in cinema. This innovation point in cinema is built on simplicity of form, aesthetics of repetition and depth of composition rather than constantly pursuing new things. While the Zen archetype provides a new way of seeing by turning Western-style popular films upside down in Ozu's films, the audience is also taken on an endless inner journey with this understanding (Schrader, 2008).

Another movement that forms the foundations of the Minimalist Cinema tradition is seen as Italian Neorealism. This movement “tries to make its audience look at the real world with new eyes by conveying its reality within its own dramatic tension” (Adalı, 1986, p. 8). It is seen that directors such as Roberto Rossellini, one of the prominent names of the movement, generally preferred a plain language that was not elaborate (Bağdatlı, 2000, p. 16). When the main lines of this movement are examined, there is no worldview and the same aesthetic perception along the same lines. In this movement, where content rather than aesthetic concerns prevails, it is noticeable that a generally anti-war stance prevails (Yıldırım, 2021). Along with the anti-war stance of the directors in the Italian Neorealism line, the economic collapse of the Italian people and the social and spiritual reversals surrounding this were addressed by directors such as Antonioni, De Sica, Visconti as well as Rossellini. The Neorealist art movement, which opposed the phenomenon of war and examined this phenomenon specifically in terms of the economic and spiritual crises created by World War II, used cinema as a means of narration with plain language, starting from the daily events of Italy. When the characteristic features of the neo-realist movement in cinema are examined (Yıldırım, 2021).

- Reality of events and places,
- Problematic of social reality,
- Social crises and problems.

Italian neo-realism aims to show reality in every aspect. From the existence of an occupation situation in Italy to the events on the streets of cities such as Florence or Rome, the places are shown in the films of the movement with all their clarity. From managing the set with semi-professional or completely amateur actors to natural light preferences, it is seen that it is a movement compatible with the minimalist cinema movement. Similarly, in this movement, nuances such as not using dramatization and reflecting the reality that occurs on the street during shooting without fictionality place the minimalist art movement and the neo-realismo movement in a similar position.

Based on the cinema movements mentioned at the beginning of the study, the film *Il Buco* (2021), one of the recent Italian films that stands out with its minimalist perspective, is discussed in this study. The object of research is the visual elements of *Il Buco*, directed by Michelangelo Frammartino, who can be considered a representative of a minimalist school. The film is examined around various scenes in order to make sense of the parts of the minimalist theme. The aim is to make sense of the visual elements in the film with the help of cinematographic analysis. The simplicity of the minimalist cinematographic language of the film *Il Buco* offers an important research object to make sense of the basic elements of the minimalist theme. In this context, *Il Buco* develops a minimalist narrative especially through stage structures, while also including dynamics such as “geometric arrangements, the question of spiritual landscape and inverted dramatic construction” put forward by Kovács (Kovács, 2010, p. 158). The prominence of an aesthetic structure in the film that relates the characters’ states of mind and their existence to their surroundings also allows the audience to make sense of themselves spiritually (Sivas Gülçür, 2016, p. 1).

Analytical minimalism operates at a dialectical level of interaction in terms of form and content. In this manner, the regular reduction of narrative elements paradoxically intensifies the emotional involvement of the audience in the film text. Antonioni’s long takes and geometric compositions, in particular, are seen as interpretive tools that shift

the viewer's focus beyond aesthetic preferences, from the anticipated plot development to the temporal and spatial relationships between characters (Chatman, 1985, p. 42). At this point, an epistemological structure emerges, compelling viewers to extract meaning from the film's temporal duration. The analytical dimension appears to emerge when viewers are forced to actively decipher the relationship between character psychology and the environmental order. Indeed, this process transforms passive consumption into active interpretation (Brunette, 1998, p. 89). In the film *Il Buco*, the space itself functions as a character and this situation leads the audience to an inner journey, as in Antonioni's cinema.

Frammartino's use of natural environments and real light is at the forefront; this allows the film to be evaluated under the influence of the Italian Neorealism movement. Again, the dramatic structure in the film takes on a minimalist structure as the narrative does not progress in constant tension. The tension constantly confronts the audience with an inner void, and the fact that dramatic conflicts are not resolved with typical narratives leaves the audience in constant curiosity. In this context, *Il Buco* represents an important stage in the minimal evolution of modernist cinema. Frammartino's analytical minimalism approach invites the audience to a constant internal questioning on both visual and semantic levels. Similarly, this study, which is based on Kovács' analytical minimalism theory, offers inferences about the aesthetic and philosophical nuances of minimalism in addition to the interpretation of the visual elements in the film.

## 1. Minimalism in Cinema

The minimalist approach in cinema has been a narrative style frequently used especially by modernist film directors. The films of Michelangelo Antonioni, one of the famous directors of the Italian neo-realism art movement, can be shown as classic examples of minimalist cinema in this sense. As Kovács (2010) also stated, Antonioni films generally present an inverted dramatic structure in terms of their dramatic structure; in other words, dramatic tension is given intensely at the beginning of the film and this tension decreases and eventually becomes stagnant as the plot progresses. This situation gives the viewer a sense of real-time and continuous existential chaotic crisis. It can be said that this situation serves the principle of "telling more with less", which is one of the basic characteristics of minimalist cinema (Kovács, 2010, pp. 162-165) Antonioni's film "Adventure" (1960) is one of the most meaningful examples in understanding the functionality of minimalist cinema. The chain of events that take shape around the disappearance of the character Anna in the film actually represents the disappearance of her disappearance. This is a point also emphasized by Bonitzer; The dramatic structure in the film does not attempt to reach a solution or conclusion in the traditional sense. Instead, it is based on the characters confronting their inner worlds and fragmented identities (Bonitzer, 2006, pp. 200-202). Anna's disappearance is actually presented in the film in a way that is compatible with minimal measures as a phenomenon in which death is aestheticized. It can be stated that in a cinematic environment where natural scenes are used instead of artificial scenes, actors and sets are presented naturally, and natural light is preferred instead of artificial light, films within the framework of the Italian neo-realism movement have the factors that give rise to minimalism.

When Bazin's theory of realism is examined, it can be seen that minimalist cinema imitates many things within the scope of realist theory. As Aitken (2015) also stated, the real-time sequences, single-shot shooting techniques and deep focus in Antonioni's film "Adventure" show the effects of the theory of realism on minimalist cinema (Aitken,

2015, p. 406). This paradigm reveals that minimalist cinema is not limited to a narrative method, but also shows itself as a visual style. When viewed from this perspective, it can be seen that the minimalist cinema approach has a different style not only in terms of storytelling but also in terms of shooting techniques.

Ozu. Yasujiro Ozu's interest in the theme of family in his films and the narrative he built on symbols inspired by Zen Buddhism are significantly based on Japanese culture. The most striking feature of the director's cinematographic style is a slow narrative tempo and the succession of similar scene frames. The influence of Zen Buddhism on minimalism at the cinematic level is conveyed through philosophical principles that directly influence formal techniques. Zen's concept of mu (emptiness-nothingness) emerges cinematically in films through negative space and temporal gaps. What Schrader calls the "frozen moment," which halts normal time for transcendent experience, becomes its own form of content in the sense of stasis (Schrader, 2018, p. 76). Schrader's context of stasis differs significantly from the negation of Western modernism. In this sense, Beckett's minimalism focuses on existentialism, while Zen minimalism does not treat emptiness as a nihilistic structure of absence. The emptiness in Zen minimalism is constructed as a space of becoming. Wabi-sabi is the Zen doctrine that beauty can be found in ephemeral, imperfect, and incomplete things. Ozu shapes his films from this perspective, embracing narrative ambiguity and focusing on worn-out objects, aging bodies, and the silent manifestations of everyday life. Shizen (naturalness, free from artificiality) shapes the preference for non-professional actors, location shooting, and natural sound, which are hallmarks of both Japanese minimalist cinema and Italian neorealism (Geist, 1997, p. 107). Zen Buddhism's focus on mindfulness (sati) focuses on the changes in the experience of being a viewer by maintaining present-moment awareness. Long shots and static compositions serve a similar purpose to meditation practice, teaching viewers to find depth in simplicity by remaining aware during long periods of nothingness (Sobchack, 1992, pp. 3-20). Zen master Dōgen's famous dictum, "To examine the self is to forget the self," finds cinematic expression in films that use minimalist techniques to break down the barriers between viewer and image, subject and object. This is what phenomenological film theory calls "embodied spectatorship" (de Luca, 2014, pp. 125-130).

In this director's films, characters are generally defined through small but important details, which gives his films a unique sense of psychological time. Ozu's 1932 film *Umarete Wa Mita Keredo* (I Was Born But) is one of the first mature examples of the director's cinematic language. This film, while revealing the petty bourgeois life, also reveals the contradictions related to bourgeois morality. The first signs that Ozu had moved away from the style of American directors and started to develop his own style of narration were given with this film (Teksoy, 2005). Based on these views, the general characteristics of minimalist cinema can be stated as follows: (Özdoğru, 2004, p. 76).

- In terms of acting, ordinary people or newly-started actors are used.
- Acting that is not too theatrical and done in a minimal way is valid, simplicity is essential.
- Simplicity is essential in terms of mise-en-scene.
- Fixed camera angles and plan-sequence technique are used.
- Exterior shots are mostly preferred and artificial light is generally avoided.
- Artificial effects are not applied.

- In dialogues, the current recording is used instead of post-synchronization recording.
- Situations such as the use of extra external music are not generally encountered.

Late modernist cinema has undergone a major transformation in terms of aesthetics, especially since the mid-20th century. One of the most important characteristics of this period is the increasing influence of minimalist approaches in cinema. Minimalism is characterized by the systematic reduction of visual and narrative elements. Instead of increasing the depth of meaning in cinema, minimalist filmmakers, who emphasized subjectivity and abstraction, reduced the narrative to simplicity in order to drag the audience into a more intense experience. Minimalist cinema has three main tendencies; metonymic, analytical and touching minimalism. Robert Bresson is one of the most prominent representatives of metonymic minimalism. His cinema is notable for the careful processing of time, sound and visual elements. Bresson's cinema *In Metonymic Minimalism*, the intensive use of off-screen space is expressed. Here, the narrative information is conveyed to the audience through sounds and non-visual elements, in other words, the audience goes beyond what is seen on the screen and the completion of the narrative is provided by off-screen elements. While this style of Bresson makes the narrative more abstract and tense, it also does not provide much visual information and adopts a calmer acting style. In this way, deficiencies in the narrative, dramatic gaps and disruption of continuity can have more significant effects on the audience. In *Metonymic Minimalism*, the curiosity of the audience is constantly increased by the fact that a large part of the narrative takes place off-screen. Within the framework of this metonymic minimalism, the situations that develop in off-screen areas are shown later in the film, both reducing information and creating dramatic tension (Kovács, 2010, pp. 149-152).

Current research has expanded minimalist cinema beyond formal classifications to include temporal phenomenology. Based on De Luca and Barradas Jorge's assessments of the literature, it can be argued that Slow Cinema places minimalist aesthetics within the context of late capitalism. Filmmaking focused on duration is, accordingly, seen as a form of temporal resistance against neoliberal acceleration. The slow cinema approach, synonymous with long takes and the elimination of drama, serves as an aesthetic critique of the value contemporary culture places on productivity combined with speed (de Luca & Barradas, 2016, pp. 1-21). Flanagan's comprehensive theorization identifies the formal characteristics of slow cinema, while situating these techniques within post-war modernist traditions extending from Italian Neorealism to contemporary cinema. In this context, minimalism's evolution has occurred from Antonioni's alienation to directors like Ming-liang and Weerasethakul (Flanagan, 2012, pp. 50-70).

Antonioni's cinema also represents a different form of minimalism. His "analytical minimalism" is defined by long shots, patient camera movements and geometric arrangements. Antonioni's landscapes identify with the characters' states of mind, allowing the viewer to experience a non-symbolic but organic reflection of an inner life. Antonioni's cinema reflects the alienation of the characters' relationships with their surroundings, a kind of existential void. Both directors stand out as key figures in understanding the cinema of the late modern period. While Bresson reduces the narrative to a more abstract level, Antonioni examines the relationships with the environment and matches the characters' inner worlds with the space. The minimalist elements in the directors' cinema, on the one hand, adopt the aesthetic principles of modernism such as abstraction and subjectivity, and on the other hand, radically reshape the narrative language of cinema. In this context, minimalism is not only a formal tendency, but also a

philosophical stance and a way of questioning human experience through the basic tools of cinema (Kovács, 2010, pp. 157-158).

Sobchack's approach to cinematic slowness reveals how the extended duration of cinematic time transforms the spectator's understanding from passive consumption to bodily meditation. Drawing on Merleau Ponty's approach, Sobchack's argues that the minimalist strategies of slow cinema create a slow cinema that prioritizes physical duration and contemplation over narrative convention (Sobchack, 1992, pp. 3-10). Chatman's analysis of Antonioni's "rhetoric of surfaces" is significant in this regard. In this analysis, minimalist visual elements, instead of verbal narrative, shape what Chatman calls "narrative through visual minimalism." In Antonioni, meaning emerges in the arrangement of visual surfaces beyond verbal narrative. Thus, the camera focuses on surfaces that create psychological impact through visual abstractions rather than dramatic actions (Chatman, 1985, pp. 25-35).

Minimalism involves not only the reduction of formal elements, but also the intensification of meaning and emotional depth. Ingmar Bergman's cinema is seen as one of the examples of cinema that can use minimalism in a touching way in this sense. The minimalism in Bergman's films has created a film style that goes beyond the limitation of visual elements and takes the viewer on a journey into the inner worlds of the characters. Bergman used minimalism intensively in his visual language, which he developed especially between the 1960s and 1970s. In Bergman's films, the landscapes are mostly bare and deserted, usually established with loneliness, and there are visual imagery reflecting psychological conflicts (Kovács, 2010, pp. 171-174). Although the director's films do not use as many landscape images as other minimalist directors such as Antonioni, close-up shots are used to compensate for this and maintain the dramatic factors. In this way, the concept of the background within the scene in the director's films is also reduced to a minimal level of use (di Carlo vd., 2007, p. 57).

## **2. Analytical Minimalism: Style in Antonioni's Cinema**

Michelangelo Antonioni's cinematic language is associated with the analytical minimalism approach, which is particularly evident in his early films (1950s). Long shooting times, complex camera movements and geometric visual arrangements are prominent in the director's films from this period. The fact that Antonioni calls this style "analytical" is based on two basic features in terms of form: the tendency towards geometric arrangements and the effort to clearly separate the two separate dimensions of the form. These features are seen as the characters and the background on one side and the plot and the viewer's control over time on the other. In Antonioni's early films (1950s), long shots and complex camera movements serve the function of establishing the dramatic relationship between the characters' mental states and their surroundings, beyond telling the plot. These films have a structure that emphasizes that the characters experience a kind of alienation from the outside world, rather than the landscape's purpose of symbolizing their inner world. Especially in productions such as *The Scream* (*Il Grido*, 1957), a relationship is established between the landscape and the character's state of mind. However, it is seen that the relationship in these films is not symbolism but rather a metonymic context in which the characters are disconnected from the world around them. In other words, the landscape in these productions is not an expression of the character's state of mind, but an indicator that his organic connection with this environment is broken and he is alienated from the environment (Kovács, 2010, pp. 157-163).

In Michelangelo Antonioni's films, the environment takes on a different role in the context of characters alienated from modern life in accordance with the principles of analytical minimalism. Indeed, the director's understanding of the environment is not shown only as an aesthetic element, especially in productions such as *Adventure* (1960) and *Red Desert* (1964). In such productions, the concept of the environment is an element that symbolizes individual loneliness along with the gaps in human relationships. Antonioni uses landscape images to symbolize the spiritual alienation and existential gaps experienced by his characters. These environmental images are often used around a reality distant from the characters' lives and each other.

Thus, from the director's perspective, the "environment" is in a different position than the environment in the neo-realism movement. While the dramatic relationship between the environment and the characters comes to the fore in neorealism, this situation is used differently in analytical minimalism. In Antonioni's cinema, the "environment" exists independently of the emotional states of the characters, and generally reflects the inability of the person to fully locate his own place in this world. In addition, the "environment" figures the alienation of the actor character over time within the framework of analytical minimalism. Another important technical feature in Antonioni's cinema is the issue of continuity. In his early films, long shots and complex camera movements are clearly seen not for the development of the action but to symbolize the alienation of the characters from their environment. Later, this style took on a different form over time. While Antonioni places the peak of dramatic tension in the first sequence of the film, he does not make any effort to resolve this tension. Instead, the director constantly repeats the state of emphasizing the continuity and lack of solution of the turmoil in the characters' inner worlds in a static way in the cinematographic sense. This situation roots the audience in a constant state of expectation, while at the same time giving them a sense of uncertainty. The progression of the stories internalizes the existential voids of the characters rather than seeking a solution in the films (Kovács, 2010, pp. 164-169).

In Antonioni's cinema, while the main characters are trying to cope with their loneliness in an alienated state, it is understood that this is not only a personal crisis situation but also a reflection of the decaying structure of the modern world. The problem here is not only reduced to the disabled capitalist system, but also focuses on the deep states of humanity on a large scale. In this sense, the disconnection between the inner and outer worlds of the main characters also reveals the critical concept of existence on the search for a new meaning. The geometric arrangements in the director's cinema, especially streets and architectural structures, play a prominent role. In his films, the areas where nature and human structure meet are presented as symbols of external realities conflicting with the inner world of individuals. The geometric arrangements in Antonioni's cinema are not only an aesthetic purpose, but also an important narrative tool reflecting the spiritual states of the characters. In his films such as "*Solar Eclipse*" (1962), the director creates a background that emphasizes the cold and modern structures of cities, the loneliness of individuals, the superficiality of relationships and "dead times" (Cardullo, 2011, pp. 19-20).

When viewed from this perspective, Antonioni there are different elements that constitute the "analytical" character of the film. In this context, the formal preferences in the productions show themselves as a method that directly interacts with the content rather than a tool that reflects the content. Accordingly, the plot and the individual lives of the characters in the films are depicted as "dead times" with a monotonous structure.

These artistic preferences in the analytical scope leave the audience alone with a kind of existential void rather than bringing them into a more direct relationship with the characters' mental states. It is seen as a necessity for Antonioni's cinema that the stories are completely disconnected from the outside world and continue to evolve into their own internal flow and a structure as uncertain as possible (Tinazzi, 2002).

This analytical minimalism in Antonioni's cinema was later adopted by other directors. Directors such as Wim Wenders and Chantal Akerman, in particular, inspired by Antonioni's style, developed a similar dramatic structure with the minimal use of time and space. Akerman's productions such as *Les rendez-vous d'Anna* (1978) radicalize the minimalism in Antonioni's cinema and question the audience's perception of events in time and space. The characters in such productions reflect the "dead times" in their daily lives and minimize the audience's expectations about the plot (Kovács, 2010, pp. 165-166). The relevant films in the context of analytical minimalism intertwine individual loneliness with social alienation, while at the same time establishing a close relationship with the decaying structure of the world. Ultimately, no matter what, the characters who lose their identity with existential voids in Antonioni's cinema do not seem to have enough power to recreate their stories. The only hope of a person who starts to become insensitive and depersonalized within the vicious circle of superficial hedonism imposed by modernism with the capitalist collapse is to disappear from everywhere and be erased.

### **3. Methodology**

In this study, cinematographic analysis methodology was used to examine the minimalist elements in Michelangelo Frammartino's *Il Buco* (2021). Cinematographic analysis is a method aimed at determining how various cinematic techniques such as framing, shot scale, camera movement, and lighting contribute to the construction of the film's minimalist aesthetics (Güngör, 2014, p. 165). This method contributes to explaining the production that the director is trying to construct in terms of minimalism in order to examine the different components of the film. In this context, Frammartino's film *Il Buco*, which frequently uses minimalist arguments in its production, serves as a suitable research object for cinematographic analysis, especially due to its use of natural environments, natural light and slow-paced narrative, reflecting the minimalist traditions of both Italian Neorealism and Japanese cinema.

Pezzella emphasizes the influence of technical tools on visual representation, especially on cinematic representations of the experience of modernity. While cinema loses the mystical "aura" of traditional art, it offers a new perceptual form of modernity's fragmented, rapid and non-permanent visual experiences (Pezzella, 2006, p. 24). One of the important issues in the cinematic plane is framing. The director controls the cinematographic qualities of the shot by determining not only which images are recorded but also how these images are recorded. These decisions collectively create an aesthetic framework that defines the visual style of the film. Similarly, as Algan (1996) also stated, cinematographic images are created through various elements such as lighting, framing, object-subject movement and color, and all of these elements are important in shaping the viewer's feeling about the situation of the cinematic story (Algan, 1996, p. 78). Cinema offers an important structure as a visual narrative form where time and space come together. Directors such as Murnau, Hitchcock and Orson Welles skillfully use cinematographic space to not only tell a story but also offer the audience the opportunity to perceive the intellectual structures in the depths of time and space. The visual language in the films of these directors goes beyond telling a plain story and takes the audience on a journey in the symbolic world of cinema.

The psychological as well as symbolic dimensions of time and space are revealed together with space. In this sense, cinema can present a structure to the director's choice, just like a painter uses colors on his canvas (Pezzella, 2006, pp. 73-76).

Framing is a critical aspect of cinematographic analysis as it determines how the visual elements in the scene are arranged to attract the viewer's attention and develop the meaning of the scene. Frammartino uses framing to establish a dialogue between the characters and their surroundings in *Il Buco*. In this way, the director is able to reflect the minimalist philosophy of focusing on the purity of visual representation by reducing complexity. The composition in the frames generally emphasizes stillness. In addition to stillness, simple geometric arrangements are used to strengthen the themes of isolation. Techniques such as the rule of thirds, symmetry and balance are used to secretly direct the viewer's eye and create a silent but deep narrative rhythm (Mükerrem, 2012, pp. 30-31).

In this context, the director's decisions cover three main areas of choice: the photographic content of the shot, the frame of the shot and the duration of the shot (Bordwell & Thompson, 2011, p. 167). In this study, where framing is primarily addressed, the frame dictated by the director is a technique that intervenes in the nature of the phenomenon of seeing. Each framing presents a section of life to the viewer by selecting a certain meaning. These choices allow each framing to create its own context of meaning. Indeed, each frame constructs a field of meaning and takes a special place in the connection that the visual establishes with its viewer (Karadağ, 2016, pp. 51-74).

### 3.1. *Il Buco* Movie Analysis



*Image I. Il Buco movie (Frammartino, 2021).*

*Table I. Il Buco Movie Credits (Frammartino, 2021).*

<b>Film Director:</b>	Michelangelo Frammartino
<b>Director of Photography:</b>	Renato Berta
<b>Producer:</b>	Philippe Bober, Michelangelo Frammartino, Marco Serrecchia
<b>Production Company:</b>	Doppi Nodo, Double Bind
<b>Producer Country of Origin:</b>	Italy, France, Germany
<b>Year of Production:</b>	2021
<b>Duration:</b>	93 Minutes

Michelangelo Frammartino's film "*Il Buco*" (2021) minimally addresses the silent vital movement of nature and the relationship between man and nature. In the context of minimalism, the inner contacts of man with nature, caught between life and death, are sometimes problematic and sometimes intimate in *Il Buco*. Frammartino, who initially

invites viewers to a pristine village full of steep cliffs in Italy with his cinematography, Tells the story of cavers exploring one of the deepest caves in the world in a simple language, parallel to the life of an elderly Calabrian villager who is nearing the end of his life. The story, which takes place in 1961, highlights the cave exploration of a group of Italian scientists, and the film does not only focus on the cave exploration, but also shows the quiet and simple life of the villagers. Frammartino takes a minimalist approach to the natural life in the village of Bifurto, located in the Pollino nature park area in southern Italy, as well as the intimate situations of the villagers among their small groups of people. The director, who goes beyond the chaotic and blurred human algorithm of the urban environment in the imperceptible mobility of time, also shows the villagers who symbolize the transition to a state of expectation by internalizing time with the images of cinema art. The coordinated visual harmony of the scientists who are in search of discovering the new cave and shown in parallel with the old shepherd that the director focuses on, also reflects the situations that can be perceived as two opposite concepts such as hope and despair. As a result, the phenomenon of death, which is given without dramatization to the extent that it will not disrupt the common life cycle, is processed in the film without creating a problem in terms of the continuation of the natural fluidity of life.



**Image II.** Positioning of the old shepherd within the natural landscape (Frammartino, 2021).

In the film *Il Buco*, which takes place in a village full of steep cliffs in southern Italy, the first frame that stands out in the context of minimalism is a framing that can be described as “analytical minimalism”. The film opens with images of caves, animals and forests that represent the awakening of nature. In one of the most prominent visuals in the first sequence of the film, an old Calabrian shepherd is seen watching the surroundings on a high slope to graze his animals. This minimalist framing reflects the openness of man with the natural world, a technique that Antonioni frequently uses in his works such as “Eclisse and Red Desert”. The fact that the old shepherd sits as a lonely figure supported by the slope against the boundless expanse of the forest symbolizes the isolation of the individual in the face of an overwhelming and indifferent nature. In this context, the small, almost insignificant presence of the subject in the large scale of the landscape draws attention as a frame that refers to existential themes and shows the feeling of “alienation from others” and the growing gap between the subject and people and their environment (Tinazzi, 2018). The analytical minimalist use here is not only a visual tool, but also evolves into a thematic tool. Frammartino, who reduces many impure elements in the frame, creates a space where the viewer is allowed to think about the character’s spiritual state. Indeed, by taking advantage of this void, a frame structure based on a “zen” understanding is presented with the void for the “progress of the new” (Bonitzer, 2006,

p. 77). In this visual, which also symbolizes man's separation from worldly desires, the shepherd character, who remains on a line close to the outside of the geometric area in a very wide framing, is positioned as a passive subject, a person in the last stages of his life.



*Image III. Positioning of the old shepherd at sunset (Frammartino, 2021).*

The fact that no sound is used other than the sounds that the old shepherd, who has become a passive subject with the visuals at the analytical minimalism level, makes to guide his animals while grazing and the natural sounds increases the minimalistic level of the film. In the film, which focuses on environmental elements, the village shepherd and his animals, who take the form of small objects against the grandeur of nature, are shown in the next frame at sunset. The old shepherd, who grazes his animals all day long, is positioned in the middle of the frame as the main subject on a high mountain slope against the sunset. While the shepherd is faced with the majestic structure of nature due to his position, the shepherd, who was the passive subject in the previous scene, is made even more passive in this scene by the director's use of a higher angle. The old shepherd, who is framed with an attitude that has been crushed, lost its importance and has become meaningless against nature with the higher angle compared to the previous scene, confronts the grandeur against the sunset.

Within the scope of this minimalist visual, the loneliness of the old character and his incompatibility with the environment are also symbolized. The tree on the far left of the frame, just like the Calabrian shepherd, has been included in this frame as a natural extension that has aged, changed shape and dried up. Frammartino's way of creating the emotional impact of time and space brings to light the problem between death and existence with the images he constructs. The fact that the empty space on the stage occupies a huge place in the frame and dominates the character in an overwhelming way indicates the insignificance of the remaining objects under the extraordinary power of nature. By using a frame of this structure, the framing that reveals the mental states of the characters and thus makes them more dominant than the characters themselves is parallel to the technique in Antonioni's films. In the scene where the sunset is symbolized with death and annihilation, Frammartino proves to the audience with this symbolization that cinema has become an experience based on observation and silence rather than narrative. When the scene is examined in general, the frame gaps in *Il Buco* are seen not only in a physical sense but also as temporal and emotional gaps. The distance between the characters and their natural environment further strengthens the meaning of these gaps. The slow flow of time allows even seemingly small and insignificant events in the film to have a great impact on the audience. The director supports his own cinematic time

with various sound elements as well as the technical elements he uses when creating a scene (Rhodes, 2015, pp. 188-189).

The minimalist elements in this scene are supported by sound environments as well as visual elements. While elements such as nature sounds (wind, bird sounds) and the sounds the shepherd makes while calling his animals make the audience's view of the character's inner world more obvious, the fact that there is almost no dialogue leaves the audience more space for thought. The use of sound here is in line with the ideas in Wilhelm Worringer's work "Astrazione e Empatia". Worringer argues that art enables the audience to create a kind of inner void and that this void deepens the meaning of the work. The visual gaps and minimal use of sound in Frammartino's film appear as a reflection of this aesthetic view (Calabretto, 2015, p. 178).



*Image IV. Geometrically arranged tent scene in the valley (Frammartino, 2021).*

Frammartino, who shows the story of a group of scientists and researchers who come to the Pollino region to explore the caves in parallel with the old farmer villager, leaves the audience alone with the camp scene in the other scene of the film. Here, it is seen that the camp area is placed in an irregular manner within the frame without a certain order. The tents, which are presented with a wide perspective in a foggy weather, are distributed within the area with a natural imitation, which increases the air of uncertainty within the frame. The camp's layout does not offer a search for order to the viewer's perspective, but the hexagonal layout that is in harmony with the environment is noticeable. This geometric arrangement also shows itself as a feature of analytical minimalism. Rather than directing the audience in a certain way, the frames encourage them to think more through observation. The gaps in the frame in a foggy weather refer to the fact that the environment is designed in harmony with the human state of mind. In addition to the fact that there are only a few human figures and a tent in the scene, the fact that the director ends the shot with very little movement gives the audience the impression that time is passing slowly. Indeed, such an aesthetic choice is seen as an indication that Frammartino actively uses analytical minimalism. The plan does not include too many details, but only the necessary elements are conveyed to the viewer. Other elements around the tents are deliberately excluded by the director within the deframing and left to the invisible area (Kovács, 2010, p. 157). The arrangement of the tents in the plan further strengthens the disconnection between the human (artificial) and natural worlds by framing the scientists presence as both insignificant and fragmented within the larger environmental context.

With the geometric (hexagonal) distribution of the camping tents and the vastness of the surroundings, Frammartino tries to emphasize the impression that time slows down

in the camping scene. The director left the audience alone with the silent nature by including a few human figures in a foggy environment in the frame. Both the loneliness of the person as an individual and his existence as a part of nature, united with the foggy nature, are emphasized once again with this scene. The audience, left alone with an ambiguous situation by the director, senses the nature-human relationship in a dynamism that is difficult to describe (Hakverdi, 2013, p. 61). Cinema, an art that has the capacity to move back and forth between subjective and objective areas in an imaginative sense, has a fluid structure between internal psychological states and their external reflections. These transitions manifest themselves as existential states that allow for a continuous transition between the isolated and the exposed, where the boundaries between the inside and the outside dissolve. Fog and vision-dimming gaps dominate the frame, producing a kind of perceptual ambiguity. The nature of the human order becomes a small and fleeting impression within its larger context. Frammartino, who can fluently show various layers of reality at the level of consciousness by using this kind of dialectic, tries to transform the dynamic images of objects to a minimalist level. The contrasts between interior and exterior spaces are also presented to the audience by intensifying them through manipulation. As a result, the visual focus concentrated on the movements of a single character in the spaces can indirectly imply subjectivity. Framing also goes beyond a purely documentary function and transforms the film language into a poetic structure with metaphorical narration (Williams, 2013).



*Image V. The scene where the farmer's body is taken away (Frammartino, 2021).*

In *Il Buco* (2021), where existential loneliness is visualized in harmony with nature using natural sounds together with a silent environment, the theme of death is shown in the last sequence of the film. After the old shepherd suddenly falls ill, the Calabrian villagers who come to check on him realize that the old man has died. In the frame, it is seen that they put the old man in a vehicle pulled by an animal for burial and take him behind the hills. Here, in parallel with the visual analyzed in the previous sequence (Image 3), there is fog and therefore emptiness in the sense of analytical minimalism. In the dense emptiness in the frame, the loss of the person who is doomed to be lost with the fog in nature is reflected both in reality and metaphorically.

This scene, which takes place under the fog, is in line with Schrader's theory of "frozen tension" and "constantly increasing" pure dramatic tension. In the frame, instead of the movements in the outside world or the intense actions of the characters, there is constant patient observation and minimal action. The fog image behind the hills and the apparent movement in the frame being missing from the intense conflict situation are trying to give the viewer the impression that a world has been built in a kind of time-stopped and waiting environment. In this way, the scene also creates a frame that is compatible with

Schrader's "transcendental style" theory. Because, according to Schrader, such a style is the manifestation of the director isolating the basic elements in the frame from other objects and leaving the frame partially devoid of meaning. Frammartino aims to make the viewer feel tension on another level here; the emotional burden the viewer feels here stems from the loneliness around the old shepherd and the dysfunction of his relationship with nature. This tension that is created develops in the film without any decisive moment or conflict (Schrader, 2008).

In this scene, where there is no obvious dramatic tension but it comes into existence with the tension experienced perceptually by the viewer, the isolation of the place with the staticity of the frame ensures that the contemplative feelings in the mind of the viewer deepen. A contradictory existential void is created with the human element that has lost its function in a nature full of aesthetic beauties. This existing void can push the audience to question themselves, their surroundings and perhaps the meaning of everything in the world. However, there is no solution to the dramas mentioned here; on the contrary, the film presents this solution as a search. As Schrader also states, a cinematic structure established in this way opens the doors of an aesthetic experience that is "on another plane that cannot be explained by logical and human emotions on the surface of the earth" for the audience (Schrader, 2008). Again, there is a detail regarding the geometric arrangement that can be seen in analytical minimalism in this scene. While the old shepherd in the first sequence of the film can survive in a vertical position next to the tree that can survive in a vertical plane in nature in the scene in Image 1, at a point where the vertical position fades away, the shepherd has lost his quality of being an extension of nature by passing to a horizontal position (death). The shepherd's passing to a horizontal plane has not disrupted the dynamism of nature; director Frammartino has referred to verticality (mobility) through the tree metaphor. In this respect, an analytical minimalist process related to Antonioni's "reversal of dramatic tension" and "radical continuity" contexts is experienced in the scene. The basic understanding that we often encounter in Antonioni's early cinema, especially the situation of events following each other without resolution or causing a clear dramatic tension, is also seen in the film *Il Buco*. The

situation described by Kovács as "decreasing tension" for Antonioni films is also valid here in the "shepherd's death" scene. Indeed, in this scene, rather than any dramatic progression, the director uses these techniques to emphasize the sheer continuity of time and space. The audience's attention is drawn not to the event itself (the shepherd's death), but to the continuous, ritualized nature of life in this village environment. In fact, this scene also refers to an existential reality that slowly emerges without a clear solution (Kovács, 2010, pp. 162-164).

## Conclusion

*Il Buco* (2021) is seen as an important example in the context of minimalism as one of the latest productions of Italian Cinema. Directed by Michelangelo Frammartino, this production deals with the silent vital movement of nature and the relationship between man and nature in a simple manner. The film is processed in parallel with the cave discovery of a group of scientists in 1961 and the life of an old Calabrian shepherd. In this sense, the film emphasizes the simple life of the village people and the unnoticed passage of time in terms of analytical minimalism. Unlike other Western productions, Frammartino was able to symbolize the dynamism of the natural flow of life with various scenes while simultaneously dealing with the phenomenon of death without dramatization. In *Il Buco*, the relationship between nature and man and existential concerns were deeply examined

with an aesthetic within the framework of analytical minimalism. The film was seen as a production where the director was able to reflect his metaphorical narrative power to a certain extent by acting from analytical minimalism.

Frammartino's production is evident in its simple but deep cinematography, where long shots, limited camera movements and subdued color scale create an introspective environment for the audience within the scope of the minimalist approach. While the film focuses on the daily life of the Calabrian villagers, on the other hand, the blending of the scientific discovery of the deepest cave creates a different style by creating a contrast. In particular, the reflection of the old shepherd in the minimalist level of production expresses a state of contemplation that emphasizes the philosophical roots of the film. The parallelism between the life of the old shepherd and the discovery of the cave in the film emphasizes the themes of mortality and continuity of life in the film. Frammartino's idea of avoiding dramatizing the shepherd's death and instead presenting it in the context of the cyclical rhythm of nature is a reference to the naturalness of the inevitable end of life. This imagery, free from emotional exaggeration, reflects the foundation of minimalist cinema, where narrative elements are reduced to their essence and the viewer is left free to interpret and interact with the broader existential questions presented.

The harmonious use of sound and frames in the film reinforces the analytical minimalist framework. The lack of dialogue, accompanied only by ambient sounds from nature (wind, animal sounds, distant echoes), creates an atmosphere of silence and introspection. As Wilhelm Worringer also mentioned in his work "Astrazione e Empatia", the gaps within the frame and the minimal use of sound create gaps in the minds of the audience, allowing them to transition to a contemplative dimension. The use of sound remains minimal and dialogue-free, and the film enhances the meditative feelings of the audience over their experiences, inviting the audience to find not only their own reflections on the outside world but also their own internal reflections. This sparse use of sound in minimalist cinema is not only a stylistic choice, but is also seen as a dimension of deepening the audience's emotional and philosophical participation.

Director Frammartino confronts the viewer with a thought process within the vastness of nature with long, steady shots, slow tempo and natural sound design. The meditative atmosphere created with *Il Buco* also recalls Antonioni's productions. In this sense, the environment reflects the existential states of the characters. Frammartino, like Antonioni, depicts an environment where nature, indifferent to human existence, operates independently and the characters' efforts to reconcile their inner worlds with their surroundings remain largely futile. The film's analytical minimalism also extends to the treatment of gaps. Frammartino's framing choices frequently create visual gaps, spaces that are intentionally left empty or underused. These physical gaps in the frame invite the viewer to fill in the gaps and interact with the film in some way. Indeed, the structure of the film mimics the process in which meaning is not handed over to the viewer but rather 'something to be discovered' through contemplation. The sparse mise en scène, which emphasizes the exclusion of unnecessary elements, further reinforces the idea of a world where human concerns are secondary to the larger, ongoing flow of time. Dynamics such as 'geometric arrangements, the question of the spiritual landscape and the inverted dramatic construction', which are Kovács's theory in the context of analytical minimalism, are frequently present in *Il Buco*. The frames with ample space, the geometric positioning of the tents and the tension that does not increase but decreases from the beginning to the end of the film are seen as directly compatible with analytical minimalism. The

progression of the film serves as an important tool to show the inevitability of death and the silent, relentless rhythm of life with the slow, almost imperceptible passage of time. The death of the old shepherd, which is reflected without melodrama, is framed within a natural process that reflects the cyclical nature of existence.

In Frammartino's cinematic approach, influenced by Zen philosophy, the death of the old Calabrian shepherd in the final sequence symbolizes the process from verticality to horizontality (annihilation). Essentially the film reflects the Zen concept of mu (emptiness-nothingness), which does not dramatize death as nothingness but presents it as a natural transition within the flow of existence itself. The director's embrace of wabi-sabi demonstrates that filmic meaning is constructed around the Zen teaching of finding beauty in imperfection. The shepherd's aging body and his unhurried observation of the natural landscape allude to mortality, yet even in this case, completeness is symbolized through natural harmony. With this perspective, which is frequently displayed in the film, Frammartino connects the shepherd's death to Schrader's metaphor of a 'frozen moment.' He transforms the scenes into a transcendent pause that invites contemplation rather than emotional catharsis for the audience (Schrader, 2018, p. 76). "Il Buco", which shows metaphorical representations of death, also strengthens the perception of the indivisibility of life and death, as nature continues on its path independent of its existence. This symbolic use of framing also reflects Michelangelo Antonioni's concepts of 'radical continuity', where time and events unfold without a traditional resolution, leaving the viewer with a sense of unresolved tension.

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## An Approach to Analytical Minimalism in Cinema: Il Buco (2021)

Mustafa Oğuz YEĞİN (Lect. PhD)

### Extended Abstract

This study explores how “analytical minimalism” has been conceptualized in modern cinema through the lens of Michelangelo Frammartino’s film *Il Buco* (2021). The framework of the discussion considers the continuity of minimal aesthetics within modernist cinema, bringing the intellectual foundations established by Antonioni, Ozu, Bresson, and Bergman to the present day. In line with the cinematographic distinction proposed by Kovács, metonymic, analytical, and affective orientations are explored together. Thus, this study emphasizes that minimalism is a poetics that intensifies meaning and perpetuates perception, not merely reduced to formal subtraction. This poetics, in contrast, becomes concrete through the dramatic construction of time, the characterization of space, and the ambiguity of the outside of the frame, combined with the weight of natural light.

In this vein, the film’s object of research, with its restrained camera movements established in long takes and a slow-flowing rhythm, combined with the use of natural lighting and environmental sound design, places the human-environment relationship at the center of the narrative. Indeed, this situation allows for a contemporary rethinking of practices such as natural space and amateur acting in Italian Neorealism and the French New Wave. The geometric arrangement evident in Antonioni’s cinematographic work, and conversely, the affinities built with dramatic construction, serve as a link to Kovács’s conceptualization of “analytical minimalism.” *Il Buco* (2021) is positioned within this framework as a contemporary example of minimal aesthetics.

The research methodologically adopts a detailed cinematographic analysis, considering the role of techniques such as framing, shot scale, shot duration, camera movement, lighting, and sound design in the production of meaning. The geometric arrangement established through symmetry within the cinematographic frame by static compositions reveals how the tension within the scene is measuredly maintained. When the boundaries of the frame and the imaginative situation indicated by the outside of the frame are read together, it is seen that several visual elements can create a multilayered evocative field. In this sense, sound becomes the primary carrier of dramatic information, while empty spaces function as intellectual invitations. In a similar vein, the lengthening of scenes pushes the audience’s action-oriented expectations to the background and emphasizes an observation-based process. The method’s focus in the film analysis process is focused on the focal film.

The first finding is “characterization of space.” The rugged landscape of Southern Italy is framed to reveal the existential loneliness of the old shepherd, and the director emphasizes the diminutive aspect of the figure through wide shots and a high viewing distance. The frequent gaps in the frame throughout the film make the asymmetrical relationship between subject and environment palpable. In the dialogue-free narrative, the intermittent sounds of wind, birds, and animals, along with the echoes of the cave, are seen to express the emotional tone of the scenes. This regime of silence aligns with the aesthetics of emptiness described by Worringer along the axis of abstraction and empathy, while also emphasizing the insignificant/diminished position of humans as subjects vis-

à-vis the indifferent continuity of nature. Indeed, this situation is embodied through minimalism's principle of "saying more with less" and its image-sound components.

The second finding is the narrative's organization along two parallel lines: the exploratory agenda of the scientists who descended into the cave in 1961 and the daily movements of the Calabrian shepherd in the final stages of his life proceed simultaneously. In the camp scenes, the director employs an analytical minimalism, where the hexagonal arrangement of tents organizes the space; fog and obscuring gaps dominate the frame, creating a perceptual ambiguity. The human desire for order becomes a small and fleeting impression within the broader context of nature. Frammartino, by contrast, adopts a dramatic structure; tension is initially intense, then diminished as it progresses, prioritizing the slow rhythm of continuity over a distinct rupture. Thus, attention is directed to the geometric patterns of the environmental texture and the rhythm of temporal flow rather than the events themselves.

The third finding concerns the poetics of the final representation of death. Following the shepherd's sudden death, the placement of the animal-drawn vehicle in the fog and its subsequent departure beyond the hills deliberately keeps visible action to a minimum; emotional intensity is layered through emptiness, silence, and rhythm. These nuances, along with Schrader's concepts of "frozen tension" and "transcendental style," offer an explanatory framework for this order. The transition from vertical corporeality to horizontality can be interpreted as a threshold figure, moving from life to death; the tree image, recalling the vertical continuity of nature, symbolizes the continuation of movement. In a theoretical context, the study identifies *Il Buco* as a prominent example of analytical minimalism within contemporary minimalist cinema.

**Keywords:** Minimalism, Analytical Minimalism, *Il Buco*, Frammartino, Transcendental Approach.

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