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# Estimating the end-of-life of PEM fuel cells : guidelines and metrics

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## Abstract

Prognostics applications on PEMFC are developing these last years. Indeed, taking decision to extend the lifetime of a PEMFC stack based on behavior and remaining useful life predictions is seen as a promising solution to tackle the too short life's issue of PEMFCs. However, the development of prognostics shows some lacks in the literature. Indeed, performing prognostics requires health indicators that reflect the state of health of stack, while being able to interpret them in an industrial context. It is also important to propose criteria to set its end of life. Moreover, to trust any prognostics' application, one should be able to evaluate the performance of its algorithms with respect to standards. To help launching a discussion on these subjects among scientific and industrial actors, this paper addresses some of the issues encountered when performing prognostics of a PEMFC stack. After showing the link between prognostics and decision, this paper proposes guidelines to set the limits of a prognostics approach. The definitions of healthy and degraded modes are discussed as well as how to choose the time instant to perform predictions. Then, three criteria based on the power produced by the stack are proposed as indicators of the state of health of the stack. The definition of the end of life of the stack is also discussed before proposing some criteria to assess the performance of any prognostics algorithm on a PEMFC. Some perspectives of works are also discussed before concluding.

*Keywords:* Proton exchange membrane (PEM) fuel cell, Prognostics, Remaining useful life, PHM

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## 1. Introduction

In the current context of energy transition, replacing fossil energies by alternative power sources such as fuel cells appears as a promising solution [1, 2]. Fuel cells can be used in a great number of applications such as transportation, mobile electronic devices, micro-CHP (Combined Heat and Power), etc. [3, 4].

Despite their great industrial potential and large scale-projects all around the world, fuel cells experience difficulty to enter the energy market and this industry remains brittle [5]. Actual obstacles are, among others, high exploitation cost, public acceptance and life duration that remains to short [6]. Indeed, for the fuel cells of interest in this paper, namely Proton Exchange Membrane Fuel Cells (PEMFC), current lifetimes are around 2000-3000 hours when 8000 hours are needed for transportation applications and 100 000 hours for stationary. Different options are available to tackle the lifetime issue: working on the material, reducing the causes of degradation, improving the stack design, implementing new supervision and management strategies, etc. This last solution appears to be

of great interest and has started to appear in the PEMFC field through Prognostics and Health Management (PHM) [7, 8].

PHM is an engineering discipline originated from the predictive maintenance. It is defined by [9] as “a maintenance and asset management approach utilizing signals, measurements, models and algorithms to detect, assess and track degraded health, and to predict failure progression”. In other terms, by continuously monitoring the system, it is possible to detect and anticipate, thanks to prognostics, the occurrence of failures and to take decisions at the right time to preserve the system. These actions enable the system to reach the end of its mission. Prognostics is widely accepted as a key stage of PHM. Indeed, based on the system knowledge and historical data, it allows predicting the future State of Health (SoH) of the system. Prognostics is defined as the “estimation of the operating time before failure and the risk of existence or later appearance of one or more failure modes” [10]. The operating time before failure is more commonly known as the Remaining Useful Life (RUL).

During the last years, prognostics has started to be applied to PEMFC. Different types of approaches are proposed: model-based approaches [11, 12, 13], data-driven approaches [14, 15, 16] and a combination of both, hy-

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brid approaches [17]. The growing interest of the scientific community to that subject has also been shown thanks to the IEEE PHM data challenge 2014 [18] in which different propositions for SoH predictions [19, 20] and RUL estimates [21, 22] were presented.

Despite those recent works, a deep thinking and standards proposal on how to perform prognostics on PEMFC are needed. Although different considerations about prognostics standards are available [9, 23], they are too general and further questioning is required for the PEMFC case.

1. Which level of granularity should be chosen on the PEMFC?
2. How to define the healthy and degraded modes for a PEMFC?
3. When prognostics should be performed?
4. Which health indicator should be used to perform prognostics?
5. How to define the End-of-Life (EoL) of a PEMFC?
6. How can the prognostics' performances be evaluated?

To the authors' knowledge none of these questions are answered in the literature. Consequently, this paper intends to propose solutions and guidance to start answering these questions and going towards standardization. The main contribution is to propose general solutions that are completely independent of prognostics tools and that can be adapted with any approach. New practitioners can use these guidelines as tutorial to start performing prognostics of PEMFC.

To adopt a logical reasoning, the paper follows the chronological order of the prognostics process' stages (Fig 1). First, the time constants involved in the prognostics are discussed as well as the level of granularity recommended for prognostics in Section 2. Section 3 focuses on the data selection and their processing before defining health indicators in Section 4. This section also discusses the EoL definition. The SoH definition is considered in Section 5 in addition to the time instant to start predicting. Finally, some performance metrics are defined in Section 6 before concluding.

## 2. Decision levels and system granularity

### 2.1. Decision levels and time constants

Prognostics intends to provide the future SoH of a system and its RUL based on data, system knowledge and the expected mission profile. This generally creates a closed loop, Fig. 2. This figure could be completed with other PHM processes but only the ones of interest for this paper are kept.

The system initiates its mission based on an expected mission profile. Data are collected and processed continuously for health assessment. This provides an input for prognostics. These data are

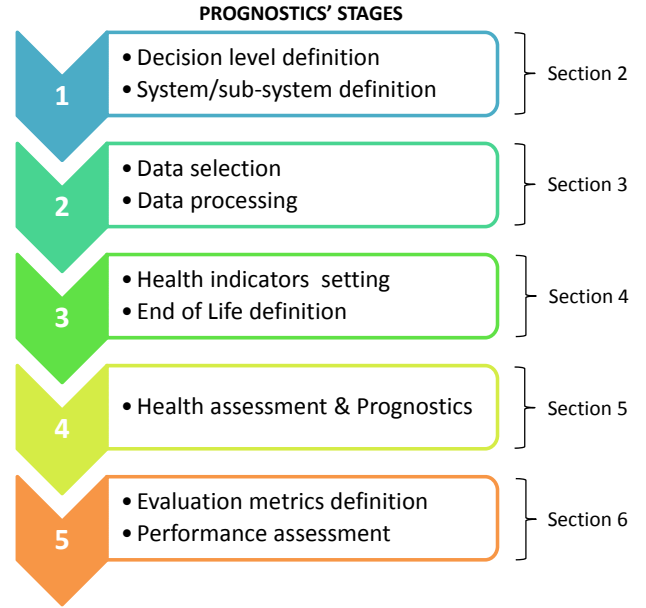


Figure 1: Stages of the prognostics' process

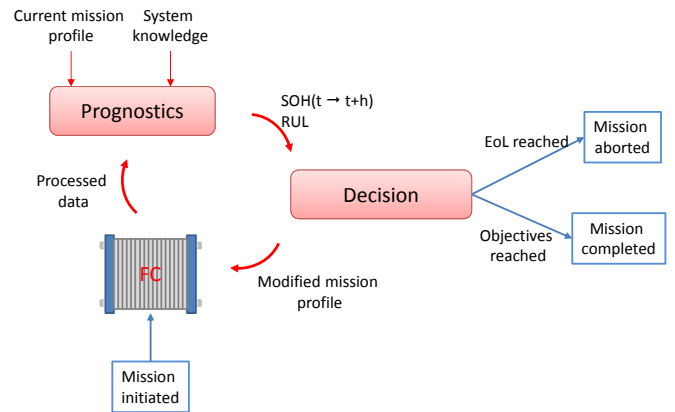


Figure 2: The system-prognostics-decision loop

used, alone or combined with a model according to the prognostics' approach, to predict the future SoH based on the planned mission profile. According to the predictions, this profile can be modified and adapted to the actual capabilities of the system. This process is repeated until the system reaches its mission or fails.

Different levels of decision exist with respect to different time scales (Fig. 3). Regarding PEMFC, the time scales go from the microseconds to months (Fig. 4). Among all the phenomena occurring within the PEMFC, the accumulation of degradation and ageing effects are the main factors that shorten the RUL [24]. Consequently, to perform prognostics, phenomena with time constants greater than the hour are considered. This enables making mid-term and long term predictions and the consequent decisions. Lower

117 scales are more related to adaptive control or system re-143  
 118 configuration.

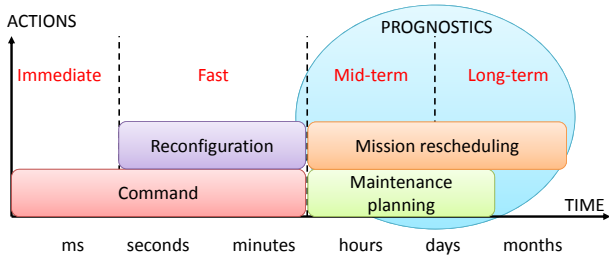


Figure 3: Different levels of decision and link with prognostics

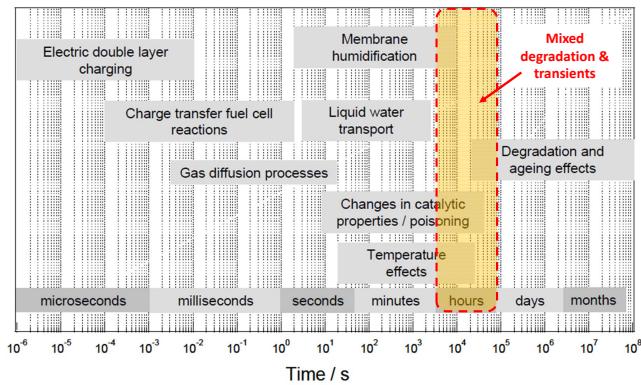


Figure 4: Time scales in a PEMFC adapted from [25]

119 Covering all possible uses, events and configuration en-161  
 120 countered by a PEMFC in a single paper would be a hard 162  
 121 task. Consequently, it is assumed that prognostics is per-163  
 122 formed on a single stack working in its nominal conditions. 164  
 123 The decision is out of the scope of that paper, even if it is 165  
 124 mentioned later to argue some points. 166

## 125 2.2. Stack vs component level

126 From the previous paragraphs, it seems obvious to fo-165  
 127 cus on degradation phenomena to perform prognostics. 166  
 128 Degradations occur at all levels of the stack granular-167  
 129 ity: stack/cells/components and at the interfaces between 168  
 130 them [26]. All the published approaches are dealing with 169  
 131 prognostics at the stack level (Section 5). The main reason 170  
 132 is that the data acquisition is very often performed at this 171  
 133 level. 172

134 However, working at the cell level can be an interesting op-173  
 135 tion. Indeed, the functioning of the stack can be suddenly 174  
 136 stopped when a cell reaches a minimum voltage value. 175  
 137 This value is given by the manufacturer to automatically 176  
 138 shut down the stack when a cell seems too damaged and 177  
 139 so prevent safety issues. Performing prognostics on cells 178  
 140 would allow anticipating such events. 179

141 An issue appears with this type of prognostics: cells are 180  
 142 not degrading in a uniform way within the stack [27, 28]. 181

Cells near the edges tend to degrade faster. As for an il-  
 144 lustration, Fig. 5 depicts the individual cell voltages for a  
 145 stack aged with a constant mission profile. Cell 1 refers to  
 146 the cell near to the hydrogen input. This figure clearly  
 147 shows the voltage heterogeneity among the cells. As an ex-  
 148 ample, at the end of the experiments, cell 1 has lost 21.6%  
 149 of its initial performance while cell 3 lost only 8.8%. Some  
 150 information can be extracted from these measurements,  
 151 such as the mean cell voltage value or the standard devi-  
 152 ation. It helps isolating the cells that may come prema-  
 153 turely to their EoL. Based on this information, it can be  
 154 decided to perform prognostics on the most degraded cells  
 155 only. It could be done on all cells but it would not be  
 156 practical for stacks that have more than 10 cells. More-  
 157 over, nowadays, stack reconstructions to replace only these  
 158 faulty cells are not systematic due to all the assembly con-  
 159 strains. Also, a stack can still convert energy even with  
 160 faulty cells. So such a level of study can be questionable.

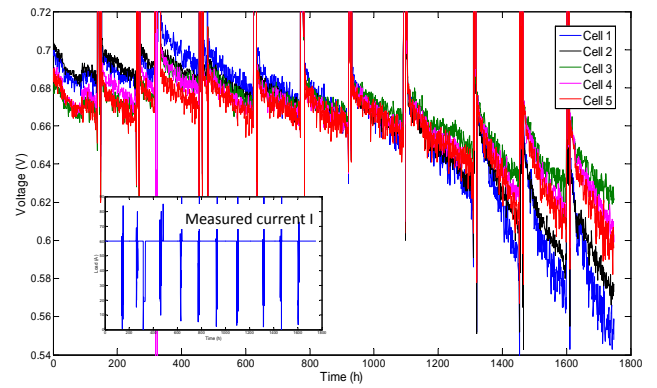


Figure 5: Individual cell voltages for a 5-cell stack aged at a constant current of 60A [14]

Another perspective for prognostics may be being per-  
 167 formed at a smaller level, namely the component level.  
 168 It has already been initiated in [13] in which the size  
 169 of the electrochemical active surface area (ECSA) is pre-  
 170 dicted with a model-based prognostics framework. Many  
 171 other critical parameters such as hydrogen crossover, re-  
 172 sistances (or conductivities) or materials integrity could  
 be predicted. Some failure thresholds have already been  
 proposed for some of them. For instance, a crossover cur-  
 rent of  $10 \text{ mA.cm}^{-2}$  is proposed in [29] as the EoL of the  
 membrane subject to hydrogen crossover. However, differ-  
 ent limitations appear when performing prognostics at the  
 cell or components levels:

1. the accessibility of the parameters: this point is dis-  
 174 cussed in [8]. Accessing the inner parameters of the  
 175 stack, when it is possible, almost always disturbs the  
 176 stack behavior and tends to accentuate its degrada-  
 177 tion;
2. the lack of validated degradation models;
3. the degradation at the interfaces between the compo-  
 178 nents or with the auxiliaries may not be taken into

account.

According to all ahead considerations, in all the remainder of the paper, the discussion focus on a prognostics performed at the stack level.

### 3. Data selection and processing

#### 3.1. Data collection

In an industrial operating environment, very few physical parameters are easily accessible with current technologies. It is the reason why, the existing prognostics methodologies focus on indicators built based on voltages measurements such as energy indicators.

Voltages and current are the most common measurements on PEMFC as they allow obtaining the power provided by the system whenever during its life. Even if it is monitored, the current is supposed to be known as it is defined by the mission profile.

Also, some punctual measurements can be available. Often, an initial polarization curve as well as some EIS (Electrochemical Impedance Spectroscopy) measurements are given by the manufacturer or measured before the stack starts its mission. However, as it is not sure yet that these punctual measurements can be performed during the whole lifetime of an embedded system, there are left aside in the remaining of the paper.

Fig. 5 shows that limiting the measurements to the power still provide a good indicator of the stack aging. Indeed, constant current experiments are typically reflecting the “natural” aging of the stack, i.e. an aging not influenced by the mission profile if the operating conditions are kept nominal. The power decreases with time indicating the evolution of different degradation mechanisms inside the PEMFC. This explains why some papers use the voltage/power to evaluate the degradation rate of the system [30, 31]. Finally, [32] shows that almost all the degradations can be perceived in this signal.

Consequently, the focus is set on the use of voltage or, by proportionality with respect to the current, power measurements.

#### 3.2. Degradation vs transient phenomena

Based on the previous comments, the focus is set on the observation of the degradation thanks to power measurements. However, the degradations are mixed with transient phenomena when time scales in hours are considered (Fig. 4). **Fig. 6 represents the power measured during the aging of two 5-cell stacks at a constant current of 60A and 70A with weekly polarization curves and EIS.** It highlights that these punctual characterizations disturb the power and create transient stages. This observation could be expanded to all events bringing the stack out of its nominal conditions and that can create reorganization of water and gas repartition within the stack [17, 33, 34]. Very often, these events appear as coveries in the power signal. As the transient stages have

a low duration with respect to the degradation, and the border between both of them is not always clearly defined, they should be taken with caution, or even removed, for prognostics.

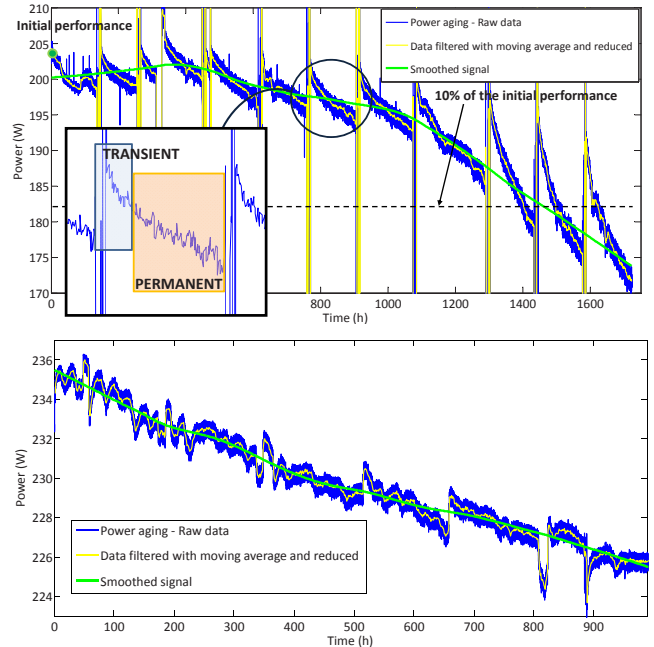


Figure 6: Upper part: Power during the aging of a 5-cell stack at a constant current of 60A [14], Lower part: Power during the aging of a 5-cell stack at a constant current of 70A [18]

#### 3.3. Data processing

Data can be easily processed to work only on the degradation part of the signal. To do so, the raw signal power is reduced and filtered. As seen in Fig. 4, because the effect of the aging is noticeable within a few hours, the dynamic of degradation is easily separable among the others.

The time constant of degradations is at least in hours while the data frequency acquisition is commonly in seconds. Reducing the data can be of great interest, as it often condition the speed of the prognostics’ algorithms as long as it does not remove any useful information. One should avoid over sampling: the SoH information is flooded among the other dynamics. In addition, the computational cost for performing the prognostics might be too high making the implementation of the real-time algorithm challenging. Finally, one should consider the memory required to store the huge amount of data induced by the over sampling. **Different options are proposed in the literature: [12, 26] use a hourly sampling period while [14] prefers a sampling period of 50 hours.**

Then, to remove all the components of the signal that are not linked to degradation, simple methods can be used. By representing, the spectrum of a PEMFC power signal in the frequency domain (Fig. 7), it can be observed that the main component of the signal is located in the low

264 frequency domain. It allows using a simple low-pass fil-289  
 265 ter, namely the moving average, to remove noise and fast  
 266 phenomena from the signal. As it does not remove all  
 267 the effects of the transient stages, the signal can also be  
 268 smoothed, with a loess algorithm for example [26]. These  
 269 stages of the signal processing are illustrated in Fig. 6.

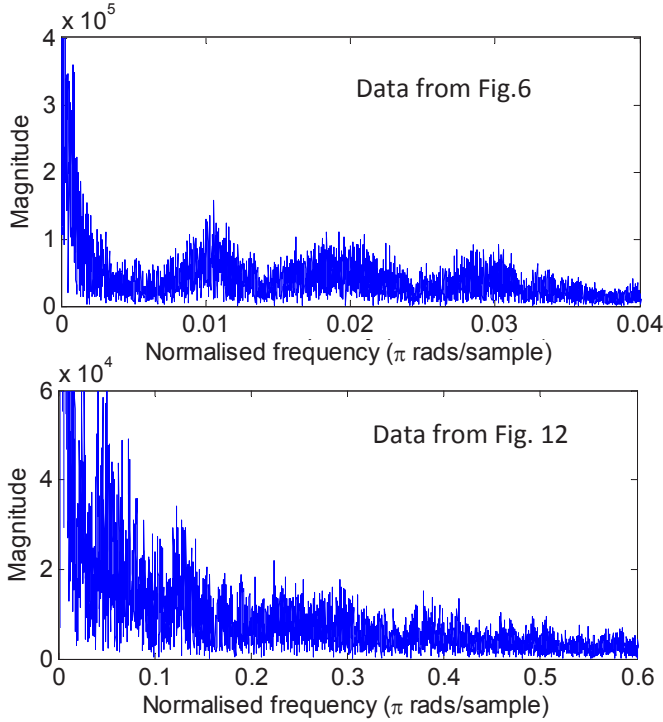


Figure 7: Spectra of the data proposed in Fig. 6 and 12

## 270 4. Health indicators and stack's EoL

### 271 4.1. Health indicators

272 Different indicators can be proposed as prognostics cri-  
 273 teria, three of them are studied here:

- 274 1. the power;
- 275 2. the cumulative energy;
- 276 3. the efficiency with respect of the current.

277 **The proper indicator should be chosen according**304  
 278 **to the PEMFC use. The power (or the voltage) is**305  
 279 **recommended for constant mission profiles while**306  
 280 **the cumulative energy and the efficiency are more**307  
 281 **adapted for variable mission profiles. Indeed, when**308  
 282 **the current varies, the power is not yet a mono-**309  
 283 **tonic indicator preventing from fixing a failure**310  
 284 **threshold. Further discussion on this issue is pro-**311  
 285 **vided in Section 4.2.2.** The case of the power as health312  
 286 indicator has already been evoked in the previous sections,313  
 287 so the emphasize is set here on the cumulative energy and314  
 288 the efficiency.315

### 4.1.1. The cumulative energy

A classical approach in prognostics is to construct a monotonic indicator based on measurements. For a PEMFC stack the energy produced during the lifetime is accessible thanks to the voltage measurement  $U$ , the current profile  $i$  and the time of operation  $T$  and is written:

$$E(t = 0 : T) = \int_0^T U(t).i(t).dt \quad (1)$$

It provides a quantitative indicator of the PEMFC performance and as it is monotonic, fixing a failure threshold becomes easier.

The data proposed further in Fig. 12 are used for illustration purpose. Representing the measured cumulative energy is quite simple based on the measurements. However, it has to be compared to a reference and building it may not be simple.

The first solution to build the reference is based on the hypothesis that an initial polarization curve is available. It gives the voltage corresponding to a particular current solicitation when no degradation has occurred yet. Usually, only a few points are measured to obtain the polarization curve, so some voltages corresponding to the current encountered in the mission profile may be missing. A simple method to solve the problem is to fit the data to the polarization equation [6]:

$$E = E_{rev} - E_{conc+cross,a} - E_{conc+cross,c} - E_{ohm} - E_{act,a} - E_{act,c} \quad (2)$$

290 Different strategies can be found in the literature to per-  
 291 form that fitting [35, 36] but using a simple algorithm of  
 292 the least squares family seems sufficient. This fitting en-  
 293 ables covering a larger range of current values. Once the  
 294 fitted curve built, obtaining a reference for the cumulative  
 295 energy is straightforward (see Fig. 8). **For each current**  
 296 **value, the corresponding voltage can easily be cal-**  
 297 **culated with the fitted equation.**

298 The second solution to build the reference is to use a be-  
 299 havioural model that describes the evolution of the voltage  
 300 or the power according to the current profile as if no degra-  
 301 dation was occurring within the stack. As an example, the  
 302 reference in Fig. 9 and 12 are built based on the model pro-  
 303 posed in [26] making the current varying at time  $t=0$  to  
 remove the effect of degradations. However, such models  
 are still scarce and have to be further validated.

Once the reference is set, the collected data are used to build the observed cumulative energy and compared to the reference (Fig. 9). The difference between the observations and the reference ( $\Delta CE$ ) can be calculated at each time instant and converted into a percentage of energy loss to help estimating the RUL.

Working with the cumulative energy has the advantage to work with a monotonic indicator. So, it can be adaptable whatever the mission profile. Also working in terms of cumulative energy (so in the watt.hour unit) enables

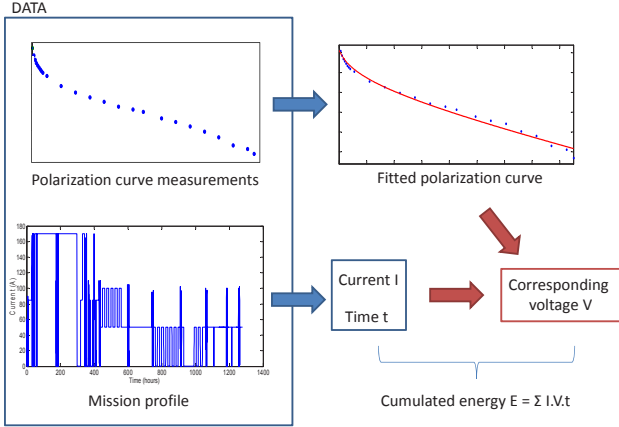


Figure 8: Setting of the reference for the cumulative energy based on the initial polarization curve

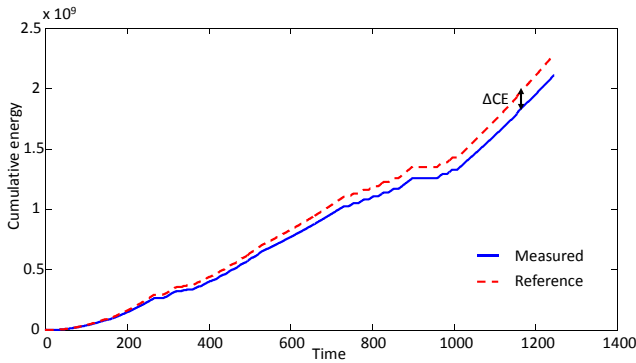


Figure 9: Comparison of measured cumulative energy and a reference (data from Fig. 12)

comparisons with other types of energy sources. However, some issues may be encountered when building the reference. First, it has to be verified that the uncertainty on the initial polarization curve is reasonable to consider it as a reference basis. Then, a comparison between the power measured at the early stages of the stack life and the power calculated with the polarization curve should be performed. If the difference between these two powers is too high, the reference for the cumulative energy should not be built based on the initial polarization curve. Finally, using a model to build the reference seems to be an interesting solution. However, the lack of validated models should be filled to enable such a solution.

#### 4.1.2. The efficiency

The efficiency is a classic measure for energetic system. For a PEMFC, the efficiency  $\eta_{stack}$  is defined as [37]:

$$\eta_{stack} = \frac{P_{stack}}{P_{chemical}} \quad (3)$$

where  $P_{stack}$  refers to the output electrical power previously defined ( $U \times I$ ), and  $P_{chemical}$  refers to the energy

flux contained in the reactants:

$$P_{chemical} = -\dot{n}_{H_2} \Delta h_f \quad (4)$$

where  $\Delta h_f$  is the enthalpy of formation of a mole of water. It also corresponds to the heat released by the complete combustion of a mole of hydrogen; and  $\dot{n}_{H_2}$  is the molar flowrate of hydrogen consumed by the cell to supply the power.

As seen in these equations, the efficiency is strongly linked to the mission profile and the nominal conditions set for each current value  $I$ . If the nominal operating conditions can be maintained each time the stack supply a current  $I_0$ , during the aging of the stack,  $P_{chemical}(I_0)$  should remain constant through time, and the efficiency should decrease with  $P_{stack}$ .

There is not an unique criterion to perform prognostics. One has to be selected according to the industrial needs of the prognostics' applications.

#### 4.2. EoL definition

Two thresholds can be defined for prognostics of PEMFC stack:

1. a threshold of conformity to a mission;
2. a definitive End of Life threshold.

The first allows to decide if the fuel cell stack is able to perform a given mission (e.g. providing 1kW during 1 year) which does not mean that the stack is out of use once that it can be operated in degraded mode. The definitive EoL is the inability for the PEMFC to deliver power in safe conditions. It is more difficult to define with a stack scale parameter once that the EoL is usually related to the component level (e.g. massive hydrogen crossover).

##### 4.2.1. Conformity to a mission threshold

Defining the conformity criterion is the responsibility of the user and depends on his needs. For instance, if the fuel cell is operated at constant power, the criterion might be the ability to produce a requested power as illustrated in Fig. 10. In this example, the requested power density is  $0.4 \text{ W.cm}^{-2}$  which corresponds to the nominal power density given by the manufacturer. At time 500 hours, the PEMFC is no longer able to provide that power density and can not pursue the given mission.

As stated earlier, when variable mission profile is considered, a threshold on the power might not be suitable anymore. This is the reason why a threshold on the cumulative energy is proposed. Lets consider the difference between reference and real cumulative energy:

$$\Delta CE(t) = CE_{ref}(t) - CE_{real}(t) \quad (5)$$

One can defined a threshold of 10% of the reference cumulative energy:

$$\Delta CE_{max}(t) = \frac{10}{100} . CE_{ref}(t) \quad (6)$$

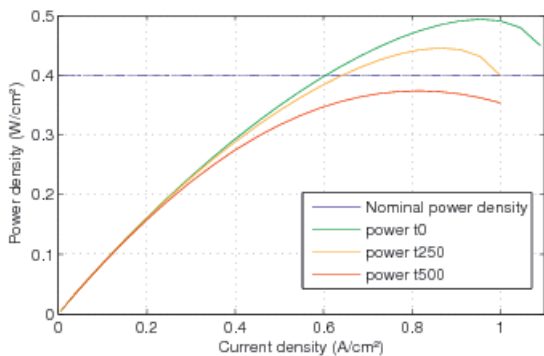


Figure 10: Power density for different level of aging

$$\int_0^T P_{real}(t).dt = \frac{90}{100} \cdot \int_0^T P_{ref}(t).dt \quad (7)$$

which is strictly equivalent to the power threshold for constant solicitation. However, this threshold is a function of the power profile and so can also work for variable requested power.

Chen et al [38] proposes an economical lifetime threshold where the fuel cell (that powers an electrical bus) has to be replaced when its average cost is the lowest (see Fig. 11). It is a compromise between the profitability (that increase with time) and the performance (that decrease with aging). This threshold takes into account the price of the stack  $Q_{stack}$ , the consumption of hydrogen  $Q_{H_2}$  (that increase with aging) and the system efficiency  $Q_{ope}$  (because auxiliaries consume power).

$$Q_{total}(t) = Q_{stack} + \int_{t=0}^T Q_{ope} dt + \int_{t=0}^T Q_{H_2} dt \quad (8)$$

The authors states that using the fuel cell after the economic lifetime is reached is cost-effective for the users. Nevertheless, this approach supposes a known speed of degradation for a given bus route so the future SoH can be forecasted.

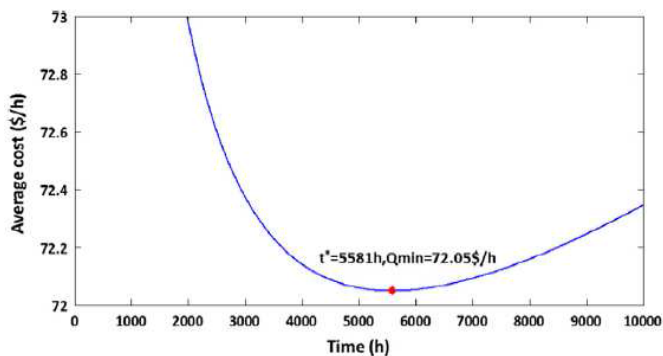


Figure 11: PEMFC average cost changes with service time reproduced from [38]

#### 4.2.2. Definitive End of Life threshold

There is currently one definition of the EoL based on the power. The US Department of Energy (DoE) defines the EoL as a loss of 10% of the initial performance [39]. Even if the value could be discussed, it is not the main problem of this definition. Using a fixed threshold for constant current application is very convenient and does not create any problem. The EoL of the stack is defined as a ratio of the initial performance as illustrated in Fig. 6.

However, it does not work so well when the mission profile exhibits current variations. Fig. 12 shows an example of power measured under a  $\mu$ -CHP (Combined Heat and Power) profile with the theoretical power that should be expected if the stack was not aging. It can be seen that according to the level of current, the loss of performance does not follow a constant percentage with respect to the reference. Indeed, at 170 A, 15% of power is lost in only 300 hours while a few hundreds of hours later, only 10% is lost at 50 A and in 700 hours. Consequently, using the 10% of power loss proposed by the DoE would have led to a EoL in the very early life of the stack showing that another proposal need to be found. In such a case, using the cumulative energy or the efficiency to define the EoL seems more appropriate.

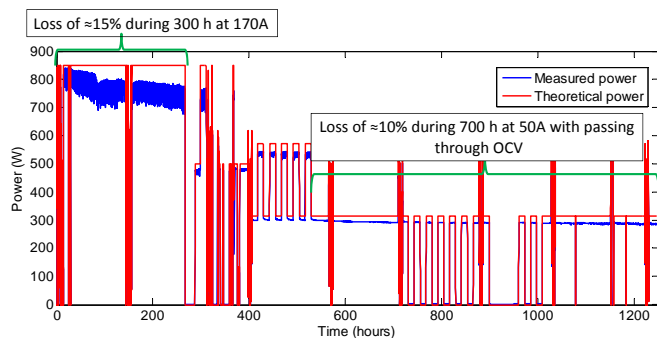


Figure 12: Power during the aging of a 8-cell stack under a  $\mu$ -CHP [40] (OCV stands for Open Circuit Voltage)

The definitive EoL threshold is closely linked to the application. It refers to the inability for the PEMFC to deliver power in safe conditions. The safety constrains may vary from an application to another as the conditions and the norms are not the same. For example, safety constrains are quite different for stacks used in air travel applications and ones used to supply technical pylon [37]. Consequently, fixing threshold values need an important feedback from the industry.

## 5. Health assessment and prognostics

This stage of the prognostics' process raises two main questions. The first one is "when should one start predicting?" Indeed, when a new PEMFC starts to operate, one can expect a good SoH and the prognostic is not required. In the contrary, as the system ages, the necessity to know

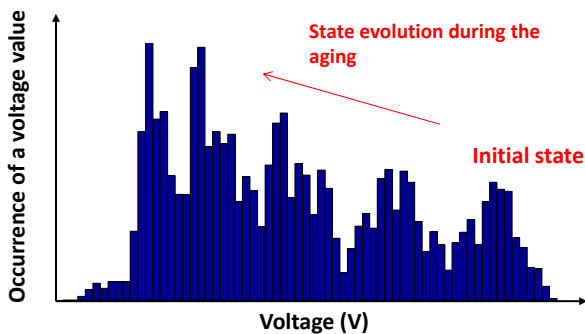


417 accurately the EoL grows and the prognostic should be 452  
 418 performed more often, above all when coming closer to 453  
 419 the sudden performance drop. But this implies to be able 454  
 420 to define the SoH of the PEMFC. So the second question  
 421 is “How can the limit between the healthy and degraded 455  
 422 modes be set?” 456

423 *5.1. Health assessment*

424 Defining the healthy and degraded modes of a PEMFC is, 458  
 425 not trivial. The system starts degrading since its starting  
 426 up and the power signal does not exhibit clear degrada- 459  
 427 tion levels. This can clearly be seen with a constant cur- 460  
 428 rent solicitation (Fig. 6) where the power starts decreasing 461  
 429 continuously after only a few hours. So how to define the 462  
 430 different degraded modes of the PEMFC? 463

431 **When representing the voltage measured during a 464**  
 432 **stack lifetime with an histogram, it can be seen 465**  
 433 **seen that different states seem to appear, see 466**  
 434 **Fig. 13. The issue is to formalize that observation 467**  
 435 **and propose a method to identify the different de- 468**  
 436 **graded modes.**



481 Figure 13: Histogram of the voltages for a stack aged under a con-  
 482 stant current profile (data from Fig. 6 lower part)  
 483

437 In the case of a constant mission profile, the power loss 484  
 438 could be kept to distinguish the different SoH. As an ex- 485  
 439 ample, one can define: 486

- 440 • From 0 to 5% of power loss: Good health;
- 441 • From 5% to 10% of power loss: Acceptable;
- 442 • Over 10% of power loss: Degraded SoH.

443 By looking at Fig. 6, this is not illogical as the power drop  
 444 faster after the 10% limit. Of course, more classes might be  
 445 identified before those 10%, as suggested by the histogram  
 446 in Fig. 13. Some unsupervised classification methods are  
 447 available, such as Hierarchical Ascendant Clustering [41,  
 448 42], to refine the number of classes.

449 For mission profiles with variable currents, no clear answer  
 450 can be given. Some work trails should be explored in the  
 451 future:

- using the cumulative energy or the efficiency and find-  
 ing different classes by analogy with the constant cur-  
 rent example;
- using the maximum power achievable for a very low  
 or very high current value and following its evolution;
- etc.

5.2. Prognostics

Let’s assume in this paragraph that a satisfying defini-  
 tion of the SoH is available. A time instant to start per-  
 forming prognostics should be decided. In all the published  
 approaches, the prognostics is performed on datasets from  
 finished experiments. So, the beginning of the predictions  
 is very often chosen to get the best prediction horizon with-  
 out taking the SoH into consideration. It is important to  
 test and validate the algorithms but in industrial applica-  
 tions, this practice is obviously not possible.

Two possibilities appear:

1. for model-based approaches: setting a threshold on  
 the error between theoretical and real stack power  
 in percent. Nevertheless, the latter requires that the  
 threshold is a function of the operating conditions (see  
 the loss on Fig. 12). If the residual crosses a threshold,  
 an anomaly is detected and the prognostic procedure  
 is executed (see Fig. 14 where the prognostic should  
 be performed at  $t = 38s$ ) [43, 44].
2. for data-driven approaches, two solutions:
  - setting a threshold on the SoH indicator and on  
 the gradient of the latter (to capture a perfor-  
 mance drop or improvement);
  - using the histogram of the chosen SoH indicator  
 to track the state evolution and to decide in con-  
 sequence if the prognostic has to be performed.

Then the prognostics algorithm can be launched. The  
 reader can refer to Table 1 for more information on dif-  
 ferent approaches currently available.

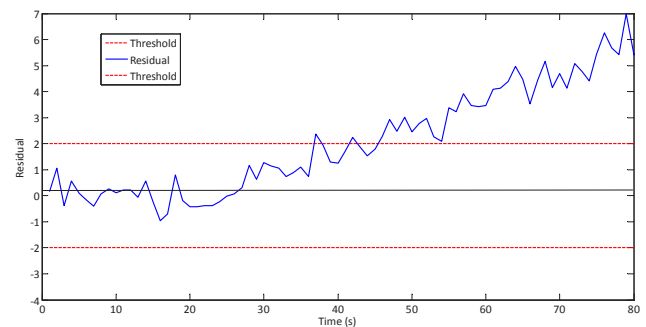


Figure 14: A residual and thresholds to trigger the prognostics pro-  
 cedure

Table 1: Characteristics of a few works developed in the field of PEMFC prognostics

Year	Reference	Type	Health indicator	State estimation and/or prognostics tools
2012	[13]	model-based	Stack voltage (1-cell stack, I variable)	Unscented Kalman Filter
2014	[17]	data-driven	Stack voltage (I constant)	Particle filter
	[14]	data-driven	Mean cell voltage (I constant)	Echo State Network
	[15]	data-driven	Stack voltage (I constant)	Adaptive Neuro Fuzzy Inference Systems
	[19]	data-driven	Impedance	Equivalent circuit
	[20]	data-driven	Impedance	Regressions
	[21]	data-driven	Stack voltage (I constant)	Regime switching vector autoregressive (RSVAR)
2015	[22]	data-driven	Stack voltage (I constant)	Particle filter
	[16]	data-driven	Stack voltage (I constant)	Summation-Wavelet Extreme Learning Machine
	[12]	model-based	Stack voltage (I variable)	Kalman Filter
	[11]	model-based	Impedance and polarization curves	Regressions
	[45]	Hybrid	Stack voltage (I variable)	Particle filter

## 6. Evaluating prognostics' performance

### 6.1. Prediction horizon

It is important to evaluate the duration needed between the prediction instant and the decision and/or action instant. The horizon may depend on the goal of prognostics. Consequently, the reasoning is proposed on an example and can be transposed in other applications.

Let's take the example of the maintenance rescheduling for a transportation or a  $\mu$ -CHP PEMFC. It is assumed that the mission rescheduling can be done remotely, so only the maintenance constraints impact the prediction horizon expected. To perform maintenance, different time durations have to be taken into account: (1) the planning of the maintenance operations, 1-2 days; (2) the delay to obtain spare parts, 10-20 days; (3) the maintenance realization, 1-7 days. It gives a total duration between 12 and 29 days. It means that the prognostics should give results with a horizon between 300 and 700 hours to be considered as a good performance. Obviously, this time interval should be discussed with respect to industrial feedbacks in the future.

### 6.2. Acceptable error on RUL estimates

Regarding the RUL estimates, there are two cases: (1) the estimate is smaller than the actual RUL, it is an early prediction, or (2) the estimate is greater, it is a late prediction. The acceptable error cannot be the same in each case. Indeed, by validating a prediction with a consequent delay, one may risk a complete shutdown of its power source. It is intolerable in most PEMFC applications. Consequently, according to the horizon discussed earlier, it is proposed to allow a maximum delay of one day. It represents an error of 8% for a horizon of 300 hours. The case of the early prediction allows more flexibility.

Anticipating a maintenance is less disadvantageous than being late, even if it can create some extra costs due to the replacement of a functioning system. It is proposed to set the early prediction limit at 16% of the actual RUL, whatever the time instant. It represents 48h for a horizon of 300h and 4 days (112h) for a horizon of 700 hours. The acceptable error is depicted in Fig. 15.

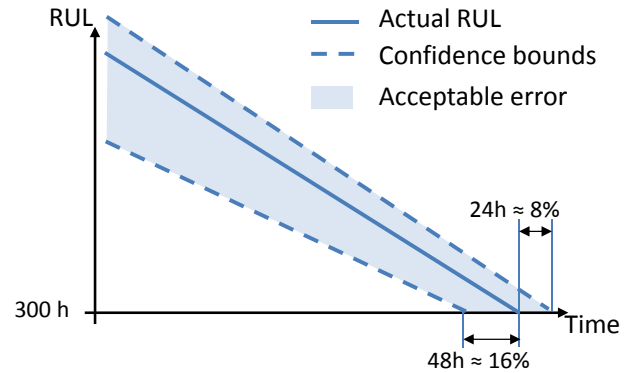


Figure 15: Acceptable error on RUL estimates

### 6.3. Acceptable uncertainty

Defining the uncertainty allowed in the prediction is not trivial as no standards are available for PEMFC on that subject. So let's try to reason on the current standard on electricity production.

Nowadays, electricity suppliers in Europe have to provide a voltage of 230 V  $\pm$ 10% (at 50 Hz) [46]. This constraint evolves according to the world location. In North America, the standard imposes a nominal voltage of 120 V with a tolerance of  $\pm$ 5% (at 60 Hz) [47]. Even if, the standards

are not uniform, they can be used to propose a confidence interval objective for prognostics. Indeed, to ensure that the prognostics' results are reliable anywhere in the world the uncertainty on the SoH or RUL estimates should be constrained in a  $\pm 5\%$  interval. Nevertheless, a confidence interval of  $\pm 10\%$  allows to assert that the predictions are quite satisfying but can be improved. Again, industrial feedbacks are necessary to discuss further on that subject.

## 7. Conclusion

Developing prognostics for PEMFC can be a solution to contribute to extend the system's lifetime. However, the lack of standards to guide current works may lead to the appearance of prognostics' proposals with very poor adaptation capacities to actual industrial situations. To start a discussion on this subject, this paper proposes guidance on several aspects such as state definition, selection of prognostics' criteria or performance evaluation. This is synthesized in Fig. 16.

This work first shows how important it is to set the hypotheses of the prognostics application. Indeed, it limits the prognostics' approach to specific real life cases of PEMFC applications. Also, it makes appear some technological constrains, as the types of measurements available, as well as indications on the phenomena that should be taken into account (transient and/or permanent regimes). To evaluate the current and future state of health of the system, it is important to know if the stack remains in a healthy mode or already is in a degraded one. There is currently no clear borders between these states. Defining which ones are degraded states is still to debate.

Performing predictions requires health indicators. According to the application, the criteria might be different and this leads to the proposal of several indicators such as the power, the cumulative energy and the efficiency. All depend on the mission profile and the pathway from one to another can be easily made. However, defining failure thresholds related to each criterion remains an open question. Moreover, this lead to wonder how the end of life of the stack is defined. Two solutions are proposed related first to the mission in progress and then related to an inability of the stack to provide power in safe conditions. Finally, to help validating prognostics approaches, some performance metrics are proposed and discussed. They try to take into account real life constrains such as electrical norms and maintenance delays. Nevertheless, the lack of industrial feedback in the literature prevents a precise discussion on the subject.

**To extend the proposals from this paper to short-term predictions for adaptive control, small time scales, as a minute, will have be studied and discussed. As it may raise issue linked to the speed of the algorithm or the accuracy needed to use short-term predictions for example, this stage might wait that more prognostics' approaches are available in the literature.** The field of prognostics of PEMFC has

just started and a great reflection effort is needed to develop approaches that, one day, can be transferable to the industry.

## 8. Acknowledgments

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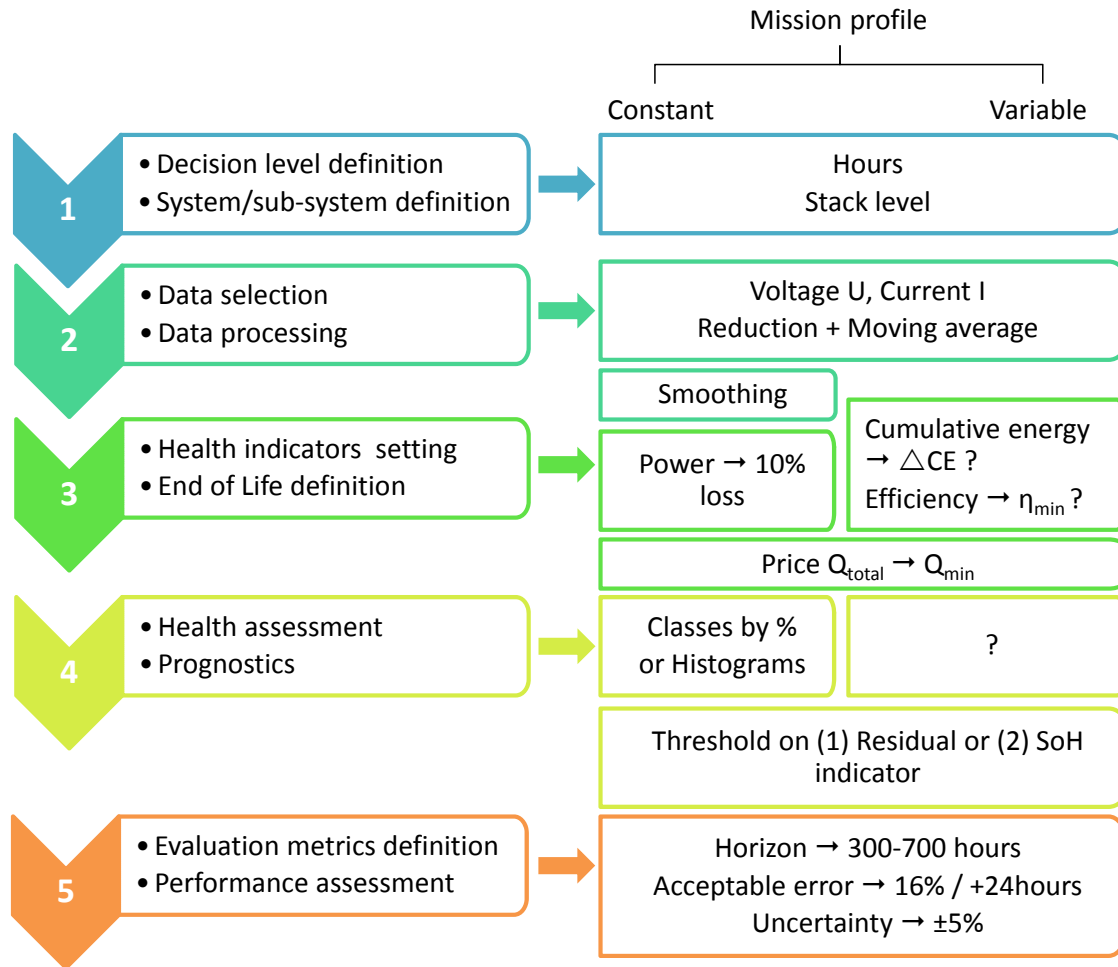


Figure 16: Synthesis of proposed prognostics guidelines

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