

GENUINE THOUGHT IS INTER(MEDIAL)

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To think is to create

Antonin Artaud

Introduction

This article deals with the question of *intermediality* as the space 'in-between' different media. Taking into account the 'theories of difference' of French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, I argue that the virtual 'space in-between' has the potential of creating genuine thought as an *event* within the concentrated form of intermedial artwork. Hence, the creative act, with its capability of producing a "new language" (Barthes 155), becomes necessary for the emergence of meaning as a signifying potential.

My analysis revolves around the works of the three musicians Diamanda Galás, Peaches and Janine Rostron, a.k.a. Plannintorock. I choose their work as examples of contemporary intermedial production that aims at the creation of a "new language". What the three musicians have in common is their mixture of different music genres, their extraordinary physical presence on stage, and their ability of allowing these two realms—body image and sound—to interact in a

new way: Their bodies constitute a part of an 'intermedial sound-sculpture' enabling these performers to present their compositions in an immediate or visceral manner.

"That which hits right into the nervous system without the detour of the brain" is one of the most important statements made by British painter Francis Bacon (Sylvester 18).¹ Basing his concepts on this notion, Gilles Deleuze developed his "logic of sensation" (see *Francis Bacon*). Not to *represent* but to *present* is what has the capacity of genuine creation which unfolds in a realm that can only be understood via sensation—viscerally. What is implied in this concept is that all other intelligible understanding refers to something already known—to a referential system, grid or code.

In Diamanda Galás's, Peaches's and Planningtorock's performances the familiar habitat is left behind—distinct spaces of music genres and media are shattered, mixed up and, in the process, violently brought together again. This clashing of distinct spaces is what opens up the spaces in-between. If we attempted to trace the various sources of their work and to define the different influences on that work with the aim of establishing *one fixed* meaning, we would "fall in with the myth of filiation" as Roland Barthes argues in his essay "From Work to Text" in *Image—Music—Text* (160)—simply because we could not avoid re-establishing the well known codes. In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze attests to this idea, stating that genuine thought begins with an external act of violence inflicted upon thought in order to "awaken thought from its natural stupor [...]. Something in the world forces us to think. This something is an object not of recognition but of a fundamental *encounter*" (139). This fundamental encounter is like a jolt, like a disequilibrium or deregulation of the senses "that can only be sensed" (139).

Diamanda Galás

In the work and persona of American vocalist, pianist, and composer Diamanda Galás² *intermediality* manifests in her capability of filtering the space in between all different kinds of musical styles, genres, eras and cultures into a particularly concentrated sound: She can be considered the first artist to feature in her performances a variety that ranges from classical opera sung over blues and gospel traditionals to a visceral collage of "chants, shrieks, gurgles, hisses often at extreme volumes, frequently distorted electronically and accompanied by a torrent of words" (Harris 20) which defies description. Similar to this contracted and 'folded' sound material, her visual appearance ranges from the 'Dark Diva', the 'Callas of the avant-garde', to a tortured or devastated body of a victim.³ The textual realm of her work oscillates, amongst others, between Edgar Allan Poe, French poetry of the nineteenth century, the Old Testament, and her own writings (see Galás, *The Shit of God*). In the clashing of all these elements, a new, previously unknown space of sonic-sculptural quality is created.

In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* Deleuze and Guattari describe the space in-between as follows: "*Between* things does not designate a localizable relation going from one thing to the other and back again, but a perpendicular direction, a transversal movement that sweeps one *and* the other way, a stream without beginning or end that undermines its banks and picks up speed in the middle (25)." When we see a performance of Galás we surely do not realize all the different spaces that clash simultaneously—we experience a homogeneous space, a single flow of sounds, gestures, and movements. Everything fits perfectly together and lures us deep into the composition performed on stage. We are already in the middle—inside this unique space. There is no time, no distance that would allow us to reflect, detect an order or make

intelligible sense of what is presented to us. We are affected immediately by the combination of sounds, images and words. Why is it that a definite description of these events in front of us is not possible? It feels like a shock—there is not really a known grid or a code at hand to which we could refer.

In her productions, Galás produces loops and layers of various voices. She sets different timbres, stretches and almost squashes tones, or inhales words. Galás operates here with elements that may allude to the *German Expressionistic Schreioper* of the 1920s or Antonin Artaud's *Theater of Cruelty*. Both had resisted articulating phonetic units but instead gasped and screamed in unarticulated blocks of sounds in order to hinder any conventional interpretation of the piece. Despite obvious references and analogies to such an approach, Diamanda Galás differs in performance and technique. What may seem a chaotic accumulation of various sounds without any significant meaning is in fact the destruction of a clearly defined statement: "Yes, I confess!"—Galás shouts in *Plague Mass* and repeats the same words over and over again until they start to vibrate between themselves. She modulates these words with all kinds of different and overlapping voices. Between high-pitched volumes and deep gurgles, she stutters the sentence, and then connects it again with a clearly expressed dialogue, full speech acts: "Do you confess?—Yes, I confess." The spaces in which three distinct realms connect with one another—to be precise: the spaces between high-pitched volumes which are reminders of the high sound of classical opera singing, and stuttered, cut-up sentences, as well as the space between stuttered sentences and deep gurgles—create vibratory passages that produce the integral rhythm of the piece. It is as if these distinct realms start to communicate with each other, creating a genuinely new communication, one that has not been heard before, and causing a jolt or disequilibrium to our senses in that it can only be sensed.

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari state that every milieu is open to chaos. They see the space in-between two milieus as the common zone of chaos and rhythm, "chaos rhythm or chaosmos" (312). Regular or irregular meter or cadence is only possible within coded forms whereby meter can change but only within a milieu that is non-communicating. Thus they understand meter as a dogmatic entity whereas rhythm would be critical (the *Unequal*; the *Incommensurable*). That means that only rhythm has the capability of connecting critical moments, connecting itself with the passage from one milieu to another. Rhythm does not operate within a homogeneous space-time but it operates as heterogeneous blocks, and it always changes directions. If we understand a well-known genre as a form of a certain 'habitualized' code, an already established terrain or milieu in the sense of Deleuze and Guattari's analysis of coded forms in *A Thousand Plateaus*, it can be said for Galás's compositions then, that the connection of pure expression, cut-up sentences, and fully articulated sentences opens up codes, and creates a passage between them. *Plague Mass* for instance features more than just one single encoding because it is both a correlation of heterogeneous sound material and the combination of two media—text and music—that mutually affect each other, become each other and thus create something new. The connection of different voices, different volumes and modes of expression of "Yes, I confess" is precisely the device by which the sentence is brought into resonance with other forces that start to vary its single meaning; forces that start to violate the common signification and shoot it into multiple directions. Thus Galás produces a new precondition which is necessary in order to push something through, to make something visible, audible, discernible that has been covered or could only have been guessed⁴ in the sense of Paul Klee's famous formula: "not to render the visible, but to render visible", and likewise not to render the sonorous,

but to render sonorous (qtd. in Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 48). The sentence becomes all possible meanings, becomes of an 'over-potential', which sets free its mad and chaotic energy.

It is thus not a simple quotation of disparate elements that are fused into an amorphous 'one,' nor a simple collection where parts are set against parts, simply collecting them as aggregates, but the process of relating parts within a single field of composition, the connection or linkage of elements. The space where disparate elements touch each other delivers the possibility of a critical communication between heterogeneous blocks. The line between the different spaces does not move in a specific direction, but is a continuous oscillating movement, an endless back and forth between two or more spaces. It creates tension, vibration and intensity. The composition contains a clear structure but it is unique and new, a self-forming structure, which is achieved by undoing the structure of fixed codes and static grids of conventional configurations. Thus, it is exactly the *in-between*, which becomes sonorous. The seemingly 'empty' space of the in-between is not a 'degree zero.' It is as Guattari puts it in his book *Chaosmosis* "[...] not a neutral, passive, deficient, negative point, but an extreme degree of intensification. It is in passing through this chaotic 'earthing,' this perilous oscillation, that something else becomes possible, that ontological bifurcations and the emergence of coefficients of processual creativity can occur" (111).

Planningtorock

Planningtorock (hereafter abbreviated as PTR) is another example that illustrates the idea of a certain shock intricately tied into a new realm that is built from connecting and overlapping

resonating media. She started her career as a video artist and made music only to serve as background to her video work. Later her music became more and more important, and she produced her first album *Have it All* in 2006. Similar to Galás's compositions, PTR's music infiltrates and combines diverse music styles, and cannot be categorized as one specific music genre. Her 'sound-operation' is in flux, constantly developing into diverging directions and planes such as hip-hop, blues or electronic music. Pizzicato bass styles pulsate with plucked-string productions and are mixed together with "barrelhouse boogie-woogie pianos with ridiculous xylophone trills, honkeytonk horn sleaze, bluesy growls and creepy coos" (Daniel n.pag; see also Suarez and Haist).

In her 'one woman' performance on stage though, PTR's work has become one opaque realm in which music and video work intersect. She projects her video installations onto her own body—her only source of stage lighting. When the video features very dark sequences or fast, bright flickering sequences, she can scarcely be seen. Or when standing against the wall she is only visible inside the oval of the projected light which frames her body like an aureole. The images of her look as if filmed through a kaleidoscope. The processes of multiplication, mirroring and overlapping generate a special space in-between, which exists in this case 'in-between' the different layers of herself[her selves]. In addition to music and video work, PTR's own appearance on stage becomes an important part of the whole *intermedial* artwork. She wears baggy pants and diverse self-made futuristic paper maché masks or hats. From her nose downwards her face is covered in white make-up. While the rest of her 'artistic figure' is also covered white, her medium-long dark hair frames the upper part of her body, and overtly long bangs fully cover her eyes.

Something then starts to irritate or even shock the percipient of such a performance. The music alone, with its creepy, hoarsely coos, might trigger an eerie feeling, but in combination with the visual media, PTR's act generates a visceral feeling that leaves her audience startled. A monstrous figure seems to descend from a nightmare—a Stephen King clownish horror figure—simultaneously conveying the clinical white of a nurse and the disturbing image of an inmate of a mental institution. With her mask covering her eyes and head she resembles a conflation—a meld of mime, knight in armor and insect from outer space. When she takes off her mask and starts head banging she changes into a vision of a heavy metal rocker. It is as if the madness lurking inside suddenly finds an outlet.⁵ This outbreak of a hidden chaotic energy, tamed by the white and clean outfit and accompanied by PTR's slow balancing movements is achieved by the means of change of direction: the very moment when she takes off the huge covering mask and starts head banging, she turns into something like a freaked out nurse—a mad caretaker, and with all the mentioned facets of her appearance, a complete monstrosity.

What I want to point out here is, that even though we are capable of differentiating between the three media of sound, 'body|sculpture' and video-image, it is still not possible to define *every* single detail of the whole compound, and it is especially not possible to detect all the single parts that start to resonate. It seems as if the allusion to—but shattered fulfillment of—a previously known style or genre is what generates a kind of horror within the audience. In addition to the loss of secured recognition, the resonance of all the different in-betweens heightens the potentiality of its meaning and acquires an intensity that can only be sensed and no longer intelligibly understood. This process might result in an unpleasant or eerie feeling, of something which has become 'too much'—'too much' because this distortion of our senses have forced them to move in multiple directions; thus, they can no longer be reduced to pre-established categories.

The loss of recognition within such an artistic compound echoes Roland Barthes's analysis of text, which he defines as always being plural, with no underlying originality. Barthes states that "[w]hat [the reader] perceives is multiple, irreducible, coming from a disconnected, heterogeneous variety of substances and perspectives: lights, colors, vegetations, heat, air, slender explosions of noises, scant cries of birds, children's voices from over on the other side, passages, gestures, clothes [...]. All these *incidents* are half-identifiable: they come from codes which are known but their combination is unique, founds, the stroll in a difference repeatable only as difference" (159). Furthermore, he discovers a demonic notion intricately tied into this kind of textual realm because for "[any monistic] [...] philosophy, plural is the Evil"—a philosophical concept that traces back to Mark 5:9 "My name is Legion: for we are many" (160).

Deleuze's analysis of the emergence of thought in *Difference and Repetition* almost bears the tone of monstrosity and horror of that which is connected to 'real' thought. If we were to tie the process of creating thought to the processes that happen in our perception of an *intermedial* artwork we could say that between different media (or more precisely, between different mental faculties) a communication is enforced; this communication does not engender a clear and distinct common sense, but is "communicated from one faculty to another, [...] is metamorphosed [...]" (146). That which has been formed during the process of communication is not a "clear and distinct" amalgam of the diverse faculties but "a forced and broken connection which traverses the fragments of a dissolved self [or in general terms: a dissolved entity] as it does the borders of a fractured I [or entity]" (145). According to Deleuze only recognition can be the "clear and distinct," only something that existed before and that has been represented. Thus, it becomes an act of violence when different faculties start to communicate, to interact, to clash or to resonate. This kind of communication, which is capable of generating something new,

bears an immense and immediate power or energy. This then disrupts the continuous, undisrupted flow of common sense. It triggers the "explosion of the clear and distinct" (146). The new generated form is no longer the clear and distinct but the "distinct-obscure" (the Dionysian) and it generates a new harmony between the faculties that "can appear only in the form of a *discordant harmony*" (as Immanuel Kant describes the sublime in his *Critique of Judgment*).⁶ This is the violent act—the very point at which the audience becomes startled, the moment of the emergence of genuine thought.

Peaches

Peaches created an image of herself in which she plays with explicit sexual male and female attributes. Amongst other things, she put into visual imagery music genres of different eras such as hard and glam rock, as well as punk, which she mixes with a kind of cabaret feel. She superimposes onto her persona female figures from science fiction movies—think for instance of Daryl Hannah in *Blade Runner* or of such idealized superhuman comic strip figures as Cat Woman or Wonder Woman, women who are sexy and tough. Altered through Peaches's persona their attributes of glamour, cleanness and perfection are deconstructed; the 'heroines' become sloppy, dirty, almost freakish looking. She combines them in this process with down to earth masculine attributes, taking on a hard rock mentality and displaying truck-driver aesthetics.

The specific construct of her image allows for the clashing of different visual realms in a catchy and aggressive way. Although the beard in her face or the dildo in her crotch are attached to her body, these prosthetics seem to become 'natural' extensions of her body rather than alien

elements of a costume. By mixing-up various male and female sexual attributes in exaggerated stereotypes, as well as various music genres interpreted visually that imply coded forms of erotic images, a new body of sexual energy has been generated.

Parallel to Peaches's visual appearance and all the things that can be associated with her—the *intermediality* with reference to her artistic figure—I would like to concentrate on one particular track in which *intermediality* is not generated by several distinct elements but by one and the same element. The track *Rock 'n' Roll* from her album *Fatherfucker*, 2003, is in its mantra-like and ecstatic manner the space in-between all iterating and somersaulting expressions of rock 'n' roll. Peaches uses in this track one single music genre—one cliché—and forces it up to an almost insane totality of meaning. Rock 'n' roll is the song title, the main part of the lyrics, and the full refrain. Like a maniac she screams the same words into the microphone as if the iteration was caused by a crack in a record:

ROCK 'N' ROLL – ROCK 'N' ROLL, ROCKNROLLROCKNROLLROCKNROLL
 ROCK 'N' ROLL – ROCK 'N' ROLL, ROCKNROLLROCKNROLLROCKNROLL

I bet that you are a sweet peach, to rock your body baby
 I bet that you are a sweet peach, to rock your body baby
 I bet that you are a sweet peach, to rock your body baby
 I bet that you are a sweet peach, to rock your body baby

ROCK 'N' ROLL – ROCK 'N' ROLL, ROCKNROLLROCKNROLLROCKNROLL...

What seems to be an unending spectacle of ludicrousness is in fact the production of a *new* language—a language that enables the listener to comprehend the full power and meaning of rock

'n' roll; not just the cliché—it is *not* the representation of rock 'n' roll; not that for which it stands, and paradoxically *not* its iteration or its recognition, but its very presentation as the process during which all possible rock elements resonate within each other, forming one elemental compound of rock 'n' roll. It is an overlapping and vibratory passage comparable to a sequence in the movie *Being John Malkovich* by Spike Jonze in which the fictional character and simultaneously real person John Malkovich 'drives' into his own body and subsequently has the possibility of reflecting on everything around him through his own eyes: What he perceives is everything in himself as the person 'himself': "Malkovich; Malkovich." At this moment he *is* Malkovich in the plural being of himself.

Thus, in the kernel of its code, terrain or milieu there lurks the very madness of rock 'n' roll's meaning. It is connected with chaos—an endless oscillation between terrain and chaos. For this track Peaches combines all possible clichés of the genre: AC/DC, Metallica, Slayer, Joan Jett, cowboy boots, leather jackets, beer, her sweating, all the gestures, all the poses of the genre, her down to earth guitar slightly over geared, etc. All of these rock elements start to resonate in one's own mind—the whole history of rock 'n' roll—and in the immediacy of their presentation force the listener into a deeper, uncomfortable degree of perception: Peaches *is* rock 'n' roll. In her performance, rock 'n' roll is stripped down to its basics; its intensity is caused by a manic monotony revealing the differences that lie in-between itself. What Peaches arrives at is just the 'bone structure' as the highest potential of rock 'n' roll.⁷

Conclusion

With reference to Friedrich Nietzsche in *Desert Islands* (254-260) Deleuze postulates the political element immanent in the active undoing of fixed codes, political in the sense that nothing new nor a new people can emerge on the foundation of an established code system. This would be possible only if an absolute encoding, a mix-up of all codes, takes place in order to push something through which is not encodable (254). Deleuze connects the emergence of thought with a direct and inevitable relation to the outside. He states that every "quotation" that comes from the outside comes only as a "proper name," which is neither a representation of things or of persons, nor a representation of words but a "lived experience" or "intensity" (257). In this sense then Diamanda Galás, PTR and Peaches become their own proper name in that they become all the different proper names whether they are collective or individual. This means in Galás's case: the witch, the saint, the whore, the murderer, the victim, Maria Callas, Aretha Franklin, Jesus Christ, the Anti-Christ, etc. The proper names of PTR are amongst others the various overlapping, mirrored and projected images onto and of herself. In Peaches's track it is rock 'n' roll that integrates all possible iterations of the genre. It is true for all three performers that every one of their proper names designates intensities inscribed either onto their body, onto the plane of their composition, onto the body of their work, or onto all of the above.

Deleuze further states: "The intensity can be lived only in relation to its mobile inscription on a body, and to the moving exteriority of a proper name, and this is what it means for a proper name to be always a mask, the mask of an operator" (257). In this sense the three musicians do not represent concepts or essences of these external references that have been mediated and dissolved by an internal soul or consciousness but instead set free the lines of infinite, immediate and mobile relations with the outside. Already the slightest gesture of pulling up the eyebrows is what forces the brutal expression of Galás saying "YES, I CONFESS!" into the *diva-esque* and

consequently forces the change of direction. Thus an infinite oscillation is taking place between different spaces; the musicians become all the proper names at once and at the same time.

Thus, what we conceive is not only this or that style. What we conceive is basically the vibration—the clash in-between things, the process of becoming-other. All thought, then, begins in sense experience, in the becoming-other of the senses and is therefore reshaping our own senses. This is where genuine thought has the potential of coming into being. The tighter the different codes are pressed against each other the faster is the perpetual movement between them. The higher the speed of the movement the higher the intensity with which all the information hits the nervous system and the less time there is to prevent it from hitting. The detour of the brain, in which intelligible thinking would take its time and place, is cut off, and information can only be sensed.

In this sense *intermediality* shows itself here through the inscriptions on a particular 'body'. It works directly on the 'figure' where text, image and music not only show themselves in their own specific media but where image becomes text, text becomes music, or music becomes body. Music, image and text not only clash but start to interact and become other via the spaces in-between. They become a whole new, open package, all at once—the 'non-total' *Gesamtkunstwerk*,⁸ Gesamt-noumenon/ phenomenon or whatever you want to call it.

ENDNOTES

¹ See also Francis Bacon quoted in David Sylvester, *Interviews with Francis Bacon*, 18: "It's a very, very close and difficult thing to know why some paint comes across directly onto the nervous system and other paint tells you the story in a long diatribe through the brain."

² Diamanda Galás incorporates into her work the tradition of female American performance artists of the early 1960s to the late 1980s like Carolee Schneemann, Laurie Anderson, Meredith Monk, or Karen Finley; however, 'performance art' is not the right term for the musical virtuosity of Diamanda Galás. Even contemporary pop musicians have been inspired by her work. The concept of Marilyn Manson for instance would not be possible without her. Another example of her influence can be found in the styling of Madonna in the video *Frozen* directed by Chris Cunningham, which relies heavily on the visual appearance of Diamanda Galás. Galás became famous in the independent music scene as well as in the art world in the early 1980s. Working already in the 1970s with jazz musicians she became 'the real thing' in the early 80s creating the *Intravenous Sound Operation*. The *Intravenous Sound Operation* encompasses the idea of pulling out sounds that are meant to attack the audience like an injection that goes right into the nervous system. Besides piano concerts where Galás mainly interprets blues, she gained great attention for performing fully composed pieces on stage—theatrical masses—titled *Vena Cava*, *Insekta*, *Schrei X* or *Plague Mass*—in which she deals with subject matters like clinical depression, torture, isolation, or the death penalty. See also Andrea Juno and V. Vale, ed., *Angry Women*.

³ In *Plague Mass*, which is dedicated to people with Aids, her naked body is covered in artificial blood during the ninety-minute performance.

⁴ See Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 347: "New Conditions were necessary for what was buried or covered, inferred or concluded, presently to rise to the surface. [...] It is only

after matter has been sufficiently deterritorialized that it itself emerges as molecular and brings pure forces attributable only to the Cosmos."

⁵ One could compare this outbreak with Deleuze's analysis of Francis Bacon's painting of *Pope Innocent X after Velásquez*. In *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, Deleuze sees in the painting of Bacon a "hystericized" Velásquez Pope. In Velásquez's painting Deleuze detects invisible parts looming inside of it. Something that is "strangely restraint, [...] something that is going to happen, but has not yet acquired the ineluctable, irrepressible presence of Bacon's painting." Bacon's painting then stripped the body of its "inertia, of the materiality of [its] presence: it *disembodies* [the body]" (46-47).

⁶ See *Difference and Repetition*, 146–47: "Henceforth, thought is also forced to think its central collapse, its fracture, its own natural 'powerlessness', which is indistinguishable from the greatest power [...]. [T]errible revelation of a thought without image [...], and the conquest of a new principle which does not allow itself to be represented. [...] [Artaud] knows that thinking is not innate but must be engendered in thought [...] to bring into being that which does not yet exist (there is no other work, all the rest is arbitrary, mere decoration). To think is to create—[...]."

⁷ It is important to note that what is repeated over and over again is not the same thing, not the equal. One could compare this "incantation" of the seemingly same with the Nietzschean concept of the "eternal return". According to Deleuze's understanding of the term, there is the unequal and the selection in the eternal return: "Essentially, the unequal, the different is the true rationale for the eternal return. It is because nothing is equal, or the same, that 'it' comes back. In other words, the eternal return is predicated only of becoming and the multiple. It is the law of a world without being, without unity, without identity. Far from presupposing the One or the Same, the eternal return constitutes the only unity of the multiple as such, the only identity of what differs:

coming back is the only 'being' of becoming. Consequently, the function of the eternal return as Being is never to identify, but to authenticate." The eternal return is selective because it eliminates "half-desires." In doing so it "*creates* the superior forms, [it] raises each thing to its superior form, that is, its *nth* power." See *Desert Islands*, 124–25.

⁸ There is a difference between the concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*—the *total work of art*—and the concept of *intermediality*. In the former, the different realms of media cooperate in a way that is complementary. Every different realm is still discernable and only serves to support the other, aiming at totality. In contrast to the *Gesamtkunstwerk* idea, in *intermediality*, the deconstruction of the *total work of art* takes place. In his review "The Total Work of Art," David Roberts states that "Wagner defines the artwork of the future as 'living represented religion' [...]. [A] union of art, religion and politics" (109). Thus, the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, especially in the Wagnerian sense, defines the "[i]dealized union/synthesis of music, visuals and text on stage" that serves to "embrace the full range of human experience, and to reflect [this] in his operas" (109). It is in this sense that the *Gesamtkunstwerk* aims at the full *representation* of human experience—the *total work of art* that should *express* all of life's experiences, but does not create a *new* life experience.

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