Music and Gesture—New Perspectives in Conducting and in Education

音乐和手势----指挥和教育的新视角

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Abstract

The inspirational theory for this research is Rudolph Laban's method of analysis of movement, including further developments of the theory. Bartee's theoretical paper, "Organizational Development: Theory, Practice, and Research," opened a new perspective on the art of conducting, proposing a new expressive style, based on Laban's theory. Starting from that point of view, my research, held with a group of students of the Faculty of Education at the University of Valladolid (Spain), involved the analysis of videos of the students conducting a piece. The videos were recorded before and after a workshop on creative movement using the García-Plevin® method. Both the researcher and the group took over the data collection, through direct and indirect observation of the tests and qualitative and quantitative approaches. The most interesting results affect, among others, the self-confidence and the use of kinesphere in controlling beat, dynamics, rhythm, agogics (tempo indications and variations), and phrasing.

Keywords: Laban, conducting, creative movement, gesture, expressivity

摘要

这项研究受到鲁道夫·拉班动作分析方法理论的启发，包括该理论进一步的发展。研究者巴蒂（Bartee）的理论论文（1977年）为指挥艺术开辟了新的视角，在拉班理论的基础上提出了一种新的表现风格。从这一观点出发，我的研究涉及巴利亚多利德大学(西班牙）教育系的一组学生，分析了学生参加创意舞动工作坊（使用 García-Plevin® method 嘉力文技法®）前后录制的指挥视频。数据收集工作由研究人员和小组成员实施，通过直接和间接观察测试以及定性和定量方法进行。最有趣的研究结果影响了诸多方面，其中包括自信心以及在控制节拍、力度、节奏、缓急法(agogics)(速度指示和变化) 和乐句方面个人空间的使用。

关键词: 拉班, 指挥, 创造性动作, 手势 (身体局部姿势), 表现力

Theoretical Framework of the Research: Laban

This article was inspired by research conducted between 2007 and 2012 in Spain, at the University of Valladolid, with students of the Faculty of Primary and Pre-School Education and Social Work. I found that the study of movement, according to the theory of Hungarian choreographer Rudolf Laban, stimulates awareness of musical gestures and their expressive and communicative power.

Laban developed a system of movement analysis (named effort shape theory) consisting of four factors (weight, space, time, and tension flow). Weight can be stronger or lighter. Space can be explored directly or multifocally, that is, focusing or not focusing on the direction of movement. Associated with Laban's Space Harmony theory is the kinesphere, which is the "personal space" that can be reached by the periphery of the body under greatest extent. Time manifests as sudden and urgent or gradual. Tension flow is the interaction between agonist and antagonist muscles; it can be more or less free or controlled. Some "basic" actions, such as combinations of movement qualities, are typical of human beings. Internal impulses lie at the basis of motility, hence the concept of *Antrieb*, in German, or *effort*, in English (Laban & Lawrence, 1974; Laban, 1999, 2003).

Laban's theories were developed in later years by various professionals. One was the dance movement therapist Irmgard Bartenieff, who studied the relationships between the body and external space, between movement and breathing, between the center and the periphery of the body, and among the body and motor sequences.

Bartenieff delved into the psychological characteristics of movement fundamentals, as well as the relationship between tension and counter-tension: For example, the body creates downward counter-tension movements to compensate for upward tension movements performed with the arms and upper body (Bartenieff & Lewis, 1980).

Bartenieff's pupil Peggy Hackney dug into the fundamentals, the global body patterns: center-periphery, head-tail, top-bottom, mid-body relative (in the vertical, ipsilateral sense) and transverse-lateral (Hackney, 2002).

Another later observation by Laban is that some movements may be accompanied by unconscious complementary shadow-like movements (Laban, 1999), which reflect the inner attitude and influence the outcome. For example, the decrease in intensity or speed sometimes derives from caution or doubt (Laban, 2003, p. 100).

Judith Kestenberg, a psychoanalyst, together with her collaborators, developed the Kestenberg Movement Profile (KMP), a movement analysis profile used in dance therapy. In KMP, the pre-efforts are observed in movement and in education: "During processes of learning, and often in anxiety provoking circumstances, a mover becomes inwardly oriented and relies on tension flow attributes to accomplish tasks rather than directly dealing with space, weight and time." Sometimes. the consciousness of a pre-effort leads to the solution of several teaching problems. For instance, tension-flow, not subjected to fear or excessive concentration, can be transformed by conscious control into a pre-effort of channeling movement (Kestenberg Amighi et al., 1999, pp. 16, 78).

The Creative Movement—García-Plevin® Method

Laban, together with his students, devised a type of "educational" dance aimed at promoting creativity and harmonizing movement, from a perspective that focuses on the creative process and not only on the result, taking into consideration the peculiarities of different stages of motor development (Laban, 2003; Laban, 2009).

Today, among the schools of creative movement, inspired by the educational dance, we could recall the method of María Elena García and Marcia Plevin, choreographers,

psychotherapists, and dance-therapists who give training courses in Italy and various parts of the world. This method was the approach I was trained in (García et al., 2006).

It is based on diverse psychologists' theory of human creativity (Arieti, 1979; Winnicott, 1974) and on "Authentic Movement," a discipline that leads to the development of inner awareness and ability to observe. In a group of authentic movement, each participant experiences the role of the mover (who improvises movements with eyes closed by responding to his or her internal impulses) and that of the witness (who observes).

In reality, the two roles are always present together: The mover observes himself, while internal psychic movements flow into the witness. By training themselves in nonjudgmental, conscious observation of subjective factors (cf. Campbell, 2005; Pallaro, 2003), participants attribute to creativity a "transcendent function."

That function is a bridge between conscious and unconscious elements (Chodorow, 1998; cf. Jung, 1916): The unconscious elements that emerged in the improvisation are integrated into consciousness.

In each session of the García-Plevin method, we find several stages (cf. Arieti, 1979; García et al., 2006):

1. Preparation (body activation, experimentation with movement patterns, development of receptive consciousness)
2. Incubation (letting movements flow, abandoning control and concern for form)
3. Enlightenment (developing a sense of unity between being and action)
4. Self-evaluation (creating form by combining previously discovered movements)

Renowned psychologist Daniel Stern is one of the scholars who inspired the method. His research on communication between mother and child in the first months of life is based on the innate ability of humans to carry out information transfers between different sensory areas, within a perceptual substrate that transcends the sensory modalities themselves (Stern, 1987).

This "affect attunement" is of fundamental support to the learning and development of the child's self. It also explains how communication can be created both within the same sensory area (one movement in response to another movement) and between different sensory areas. To give you an example of the second case, an orchestra conducting gesture can be transformed into well-tuned sounds by the orchestra instrumentalists that follow it.

This tuning occurs not only because a cultural code or technique is shared, but also because the individuals involved give expression, through different sensory areas, to transfers of energy, provided the right communicative intention and attention are present.

Inside the performance of tuning, the "qualities of feelings" are expressed as "vital affects" in dynamic, kinetic terms such as "crescendo," "diminuendo," etc. (ibid., p. 69). We generally perceive these dynamic qualities when we listen to music, as already pointed out by some philosophers (Langer, 1970; Wittgenstein, 1995).

In his later writings, Stern mentioned "vital forms," in which our "natural vitality" manifests itself, consisting of movement and its derivatives—force, time, space, and

directionality. They have similarities with Laban's qualities of movement: Force is partially assimilated to weight, whereas space and directionality are present in the concepts of space and kinesphere. Vital forms are assimilable to the experience of the conductor of an orchestra or choir who wants to communicate certain expressive characters to the musicians to be included in the performance (Stern, 2011).

Laban and the Orchestra and Choir Conducting

Choral conductors Jordan (2009) and Billingham (2009) are prominent among authors of textbooks who have applied Laban's theory to the study of conducting gesture. In addition, a number of researches, mainly published in the form of doctoral dissertations, have been taken over in the United States, New Zealand, Portugal, and Spain.

In 1977, conductor Neal Bartee first advocated the study of Laban Movement Analysis in order to make the conductor's gesture more conscious and expressive (Bartee, 1977), in addition to the mere traditional study based on marking the pulse (cf. Billingham, 2001).

The Hungarian choreographer's principles have also been found to be effective for students who apparently have no aptitude for direction and those being hindered by shyness or difficulty. By becoming aware of the gesture-music relationship inherent in Laban Movement Analysis, they acquire greater musicality and sensitivity at times than those who are more extroverted and coordinated (Poch, 1982).

Conductor Charles Gambetta believes it is possible to incorporate basic actions within the musical flow punctuated by the metrical unit (Gambetta, 2005). According to him and other researchers, it can enrich the consciousness of individual stylistic traits, imagination, expressive and communicative vocabulary (ibid.; Benge, 1996; Mateus, 2009) as well as emphasize the usefulness of participating in a short course on Laban (ibid.). Some research on the topic, however, points to the difficulty in distinguishing between the contribution of Laban Movement Analysis and that of different levels of expertise among participants (Huntleigh, 2017). Hence, the importance of collecting both quantitative and qualitative data.

According to Plaag (2008) and Mathers (2008), the study of expressive nuances can be effectively introduced in the early stages of training. Other conducting training programs that might already focus on the mind-body connection, the development of motor skills and the importance of proprioception in the learning process (such as those of Dalcroze, Delsarte, Alexander, and Feldenkreis) could also include the Laban's theory devoted to the direction of gestures (Mathers, 2008).

A Survey of Laban and Conducting: A Research

Method

In the following study, participants were videotaped while conducting the *Afro Blue* piece before and after a 10-hour workshop. Then, they analyzed the communicative and expressive results in gesture and music performance.

Data Collection: Direct and Indirect Observation

The author's accountability was ensured by the clarity of the design, methodology, and transparency regarding data collection strategies, as well as the triangulation-integration of direct and indirect observation by all subjects integrated with quantitative data collection in a quasi-experimental approach.

The research design was based on the context and patterns that emerged in the literature review. The starting point was the author's doctoral research (Lombardo, 2012), enriched by further contributions in a volume for academic and student use (Lombardo, 2023).

In meeting 5 of the workshop, the group received guidelines on how to fill out the self-reports on the course, on the pretest and the posttest. The self-reports were collected on the last date. The main assessment was administered where participants evaluated the communicative effectiveness of the gesture, before and after the course, through a general and a detailed description. The students covered another final self-assessment where they compared the videos of their pretest and posttest. In the quantitative analysis of the data, graphics were drawn up from a questionnaire, based on the model of Gambetta (Gambetta, 2005; Oriol, 2004).

The data were flanked by my video descriptions and personal notes; finally, the data I processed were compared with the participants' descriptions. Descriptive self-reports proved to be useful in highlighting characteristics that the scholar cannot observe (Bisquerra, 1989).

Generally speaking, videotaping has psychological limitations related to the impact on participants, but it also holds many advantages, including the possibility of exchanging sharp results among researchers (Mantovani et al., 1998).

The combined use of the two tools allowed me to simultaneously play the role of observer and conductor in the workshops devoted to movement. This was supported by the presence of the faculty's audiovisual technician, Augustín Albarrán, who was involved in part in the considerations that came out during the research.

I analyzed the videos following the same self-assessment instructions I had provided to the participants, that is, watching each performance in the following order: three times comprehensively, first, in detail (with the option to stop, go back, and take notes); second, reporting significant musical responses; third, to review the text and clarify it.

In describing the posttests, I highlighted the differences with the pretest and the stylistic peculiarities of each participant. I favored a "one-group" design (Lucisano & Salerni, 2002) and administered the pretest and posttest to compensate for the influence of learning the musical piece (Bisquerra, 1989; Mantovani et al., 1998; McMillan & Schumacher, 2005).

I simplified Laban and Bartenieff's concepts in the self-report models and questionnaires. In interpreting the results, the main focus was on the statistical data and the punctual or recurring experiences that were considered significant in terms of expression, communication, and educational reflection. In addition to the different percentages, I analyzed the degree of heterogeneity of the responses, the average, and the mode (class of results with higher frequency) for each response.

The sound outcome was analyzed in participants' responses to the comparative questionnaires of the two tests, which included a rating scale and open questions. The rating scales were of two types, depending on the questions, one being quantitative (always, most times, over half the time, half the time, sometimes, rarely, and never) and the other qualitative:

- Outstanding: Very effective representation of the musical events in which gestures are very well connected with the score. The gestural interpretation of the score is original and spontaneous. The intentions are clear and very evident in the gestures.
- Effective: Credible performance in which the gestures confirm or reinforce the music, although sometimes the connection between gesture and sound is not entirely effective. You use a wide range of gestures, which often get the expected results, but are not potent.
- Adequate: Perfunctory performance, with limited repertoire of gestures and little conviction. Observing the chosen movements, it seems that the score has been understood; however, the gestures fail to transmit the musical intentions to the ensemble successfully because the connection between gestures and the events they represent is intermittent and tenuous.
- Minimal: Gestures transmit the sense of the meter, but seldom exhibit connection between musical intentions and gestural manifestation. Sometimes, the movements are unclear and ambiguous, as they lack energy focus and conscious use of muscle tension.
- Ineffective: Gestures transmit little or no information at all. Management seems more mechanical, without conviction. Few gestures are used, which sometimes conflict with the score, so that the instrumental ensemble must play independently of the conductor, who does not communicate knowledge of the score itself.

The Participants

Initially, all the students of the second year of "music teaching" in primary school at the Faculty of Education of the University of Valladolid were invited to the workshop, within the course of "Formación Instrumental" (Instrumental Training), held by the tutor of my doctoral thesis, Professor José Ignacio Palacios Sanz. They formed a natural group, not random, chosen within a context in which the subjects had homogeneous characteristics (Bisquerra, 1989, 2004; Oriol, 2004). My twin role of researcher and teacher resulted in an impetus toward the group's active participation in the research.

Since the research was carried out as part of a doctoral project, it was approved by the doctoral council. To encourage students' participation, the research was included as an optional activity within their course of study in music education, with the educational pact to provide a certificate to those who participated in all the stages after obtaining signed informed consent.

It was explained that the research served the advancement of music education through the experimentation of original methodologies and that the total and transparent availability of the data collected and the materials I produced would be at their complete disposal for their professional enrichment, albeit the participants were asked from time to time when to keep the video camera on or off.

An important aim was to respect a code of ethics based also on the *American Psychological Association* statement, that it, to ensure the honesty and sincerity of the information provided to the participants, their complete freedom to participate, protection from any risk, reporting of results, confidentiality of the information collected, and clear subdivision of roles and responsibilities between researchers and participants themselves (Lombardo, 2012).

The participants were adequately informed of the aims and methods of the study and were informed of the right to refuse to participate in the study or leave it (their participation was completely voluntary).

After ensuring that they understood the information, I obtained their written informed consent to record their videos during the workshop and the conducting sessions and to share them for scientific research purpose, as the clips are part of the observational design of the study. All participants were capable of giving informed consent.

To de-identify data and to protect their anonymity in the text, their names were cited using initials.

They were informed about the general outcome and results of the study through an e-mail with a link to the PhD thesis of the research, which included all the instruments of collecting data.

Of the 12 students who accepted, eight participated until the end. Most of them, aged between 19 and 21 years, had studied instrument or singing. Few had conducted a choir or instrumental ensemble, and nobody was a conducting professional or an alumnus of conducting courses (as in many other investigations). The experiences related to movement and expressiveness were heterogeneous.

Among the motivations to participate were the will to improve communication and expressiveness in conducting, making gestures more free and uninhibited, feeling more relaxed and free of stage anxiety, and supplementing a gap in the educational curriculum.

The Workshop

The workshop, titled "Laban and Gesture in Ensemble Conducting," was held in sessions lasting between 1 hour and 1 hour and 45 minutes. It took place during my doctoral studies in 2008 at the University of Valladolid (Lombardo, 2012) with the following schedule:

1. rehearsal, distribution of voices, pretest (November 7);
2. first part of the workshop: weight and space (November 14);
3. second part: tempo; some basic actions (November 21);

4. third part: flow; other basic actions (November 24);
5. posttest; distribution of evaluation and analysis documents (December 3);
6. collection of the documents (December 15).

The idea of the workshop was based on the approach of the conductor Timothy Yontz, who considers it possible "to develop expressive strategies of nonverbal communication for first-year university students, which can be more easily incorporated into initial management curricula" (Yontz, 2001). The short duration of the workshop was chosen in later studies for its suitability to the non-advanced study environment (Gambetta, 2005; Lombardo, 2012).

The Garcia-Plevin method of creative movement, besides being known to the researcher, proved to be suitable for the training environment in elementary education, where conducting is not the central resource of the training curriculum and where the concepts of Laban and Bartenieff could be applied in other school activities.

During meeting 2 (the first creative movement meeting), I provided information on the theory and content of the workshop. I also introduced the nuances of weight, weight changes, and the relationship between weight and time; then the use of space, particularly through gaze adjustment and deepening backward gaits. Work was done with and without musical backgrounds (particularly *Afro Blue*), experimenting with opposing qualities and the relationship with breathing, moving from improvisation to individual choreographic compositions on the materials that emerged.

The core of the second meeting was the work on tempo qualities, including an analysis of some gestures that emerged in the first meeting and introducing basic actions. The choreographies were applied to the conducting of the piece. Subsequently, the themes of Bartenieff and Hackney were explored. I proposed an exchange, in pairs, in which each taught his sequence to the other with eyes closed (Jordan, 2009; cf. Penfield, 2005).

In the third, flow qualities were experimented with, centering on quality changes and the flow-weight relationship in floor contact, working on balance and equilibrium. Finally, the work focused on the gestural sequence of direction, integrating the different qualities and experimenting with communication with other sequences, both in pairs facing each other and in groups.

The Directed Piece

The directed piece, *Afro Blue*, by Cuban percussionist and composer "Mongo" Santamaria, based on ostinatos, was arranged and simplified by me, using the instruments played by the participants (including voices). The structure includes an interlude with the character of written improvisation. To allow each participant to be substituted while conducting, changes of instruments were arranged.

The meter was ambiguous as in the original, oscillating in places between 3/4 (ternary) and 6/8 (binary). The tune was also chosen because of this ambiguity that forces the conductor to seek solutions beyond a simple marking of the beat.

Results

The results of the research, the data collected, and the course content are detailed in Lombardo (2012, 2023). The latter publication includes links to videos of tests that can be consulted for easier reading.

In analyzing the posttests, a significant increase in attention to gesture was evident. This is due not only to the greater practical experience and knowledge of the piece gained but also to a more conscious and expressive use of the gesture itself, which promoted control of emotions and stage anxiety. This evidence can be found in all self-reports and in the questionnaires comparing the two tests.

An increase in overall body awareness accompanied by a decreased rigidity could be observed: many participants found greater "fluidity" of gestures and "continuity of movements" in the posttest. The discovery of flow provided information about signals related to motor coordination and the relationship of the arms to the impulse from the pelvis and torso, thus proceeding toward more effective and personal communication and more conscious "posture."

A better vision of the weight nuances on the points of support for the punctuated motor sequences and their communicative effectiveness could be observed, for instance, in the control of the body, gaze, hands, and shades of intensity. Sagittal trajectory, together with grounding, led to a clearer marking of the pulse.

The relationship between Laban's different factors was evident in the gestures related to intensity and agogics (speed characters and related changes). In both cases, by using space directly, restrained flow was used, gravity was counteracted, and the kinesphere was varied to achieve dynamic contrasts of strong and light weight with the left hand. In the posttest, greater attention was given to force calibration; through a looser use of the arms, the degrees of tension in the music, as well as their own active or receptive role in relation to the freer or more bound flow, could be perceived more clearly.

In relation to tempo, one participant discovered "continuity" and "discontinuity," like an alternation of "more or less abrupt" movements that enriches musical phrases with new nuances. Accents were marked by sudden tempo. The sustained use of tempo was present in the continuity of the arm gesture, which allowed the basic meter scan to be overcome, or in the final ritardando leading to the grand pause (signal of free duration).

In the final note, sometimes, the gesture became continuous (sustained tempo) and tense (combination with bound flow). Sometimes, the right arm was made to vibrate, leaving the flow free and using the sudden tempo of "shaking," thus remaining in the continuity of the gesture within the discontinuity of tempo.

In relation to space, participants were impressed by the expansion of the kinesphere in the posttest and the possibilities of consciously drawing various spatial trajectories in all dimensions to convey intentions to the orchestra. Awareness of the back space led to the discovery of a new gestuality, which relies on slightly oblique rocking between right foot forward and left foot backward. By practicing circular forms, a participant becomes aware of centrifugal and centripetal efforts. The triangular trajectory was defined by dissociating arm functions and expanding the kinesphere, experimenting

with more dynamics and clarifying musical intention, with one arm more dedicated to pulse, the other to intensity (see Parker, 2023a, 2023b).

Peripheral gestures better communicated the nuances required of instrumentalists when they connect with the center of the body, creating clearer dynamics gestures (conversely, when the center remained rigid, it happened more easily that the ensemble did not clearly perceive the required dynamics). The different trajectories were used to differentiate sections of the piece, phrases, melodic-rhythmic lines of the instruments.

In the posttest, most subjects used their peripheral joints, neck, and shoulders more casually, so that the flow was freer. The counter-tension (the resistance to the main tension present in other parts of the body) remained peripheral and almost disconnected in the pelvis, in such a way that the tension seeking of the final note lacked support and clarity.

Actions that emerged include "crouching" and "picking up." An example of huddling was using the torso by lowering and reducing the kinesphere, as if to "calm the waters," directing the hands downward, bending the pelvis, and letting the shoulders flow with small rotations. This led to subsequent large rotations, accompanied by a greater breadth of dynamic nuance in the music. In "pressing," one could use the rotation of the shoulder starting from the back space, generating an almost spiral gesture that expanded the kinesphere and supported the long durations in the final ritardando.

Quoting students, basic actions allowed "precise realization of a movement through energy conservation," partly because familiarity with real actions facilitates memory and is an excellent teaching resource for representing complex situations.

Participants' answers to the comparative questionnaires of the two tests, in which sound performance was analyzed, led to heterogeneous responses.

The question on time (pulse velocity) received medium and high scores, perhaps because the time parameters were the easiest to direct. On dynamics, the score of the answers was medium and its variability high; in fact, for many participants, its gestures required experience. On the questions about articulation, the answers obtained medium-low scores (a sign of the need for in-depth study), whereas on phrasing, the scores were medium-high and a significant presence of maximum scores was observed. In relation to pulse and meter, greater attention to ritardando was found. Finally, the increased awareness of sagittal trajectory and the use of weight made gestures that mark pulsation clearer.

Regarding gestures in preparation for the attack, the average score of the responses was medium-high, with a significant presence of high results, related to the implications on the control of stage anxiety. With regard to the transmission of a sense of self-confidence to musicians, the average response score was among the highest, with prevalence of high scores; the communicative importance of gestures, achieved if the conductor is not too focused on the score, was emphasized. For what concerns the control of performance, the average score was medium-high. In the post-tests, we discerned more awareness of movement (manifested in a more extroverted expressive style) and greater control of direction strategies, body tension, and nervousness.

Regarding the relationship between gestures and musical events in the score, the scores were medium to high; in some cases, different sections of the piece were directed

by varying the use of the kinesphere, thus creating dynamic contrasts. In relation to the expressive range in the interpretation of the score, the responses were heterogeneous, with specific reflection on exploring personal styles and discovering a less "cold and rigid" mode. The theme of the conductor's relationship with musicians through gesture was given medium-high scores with heterogeneous reflections.

Comparison of entry and exit tests showed that even in a short course with beginners, new concepts are learned, anchoring them in concrete experiences and thus enriching the musician's self-concept in expressive, motor, and gestural terms (Palacios Sanz & Lombardo, 2012).

In particular, a clearer preparation of gestures was linked to the experience of a personal style that nurtured self-confidence and the maturation of pre-efforts in efforts. Students were faced with the effectiveness of their gestures in the refining of self-perceptive skills, in the increased awareness of the relationship among movement factors and the various parts of the body, and in the placement of greater value on self-observation and self-training.

Widespread was the tendency to remain in the continuity of the gesture within the discontinuity of time, and this allowed for more emphasis on points with crown and highlights in agogics (rallentando and accelerando), dynamics (crescendo and diminuendo), and articulation (accents). Despite the lack of prior knowledge, a large proportion of participants were able to spontaneously modulate the kinesphere, efforts and basic actions in preparing for attacks, agogic changes, accents, dynamic changes, transitions between sections of the piece, or other significant moments in the score.

As a final reflection, self-observation is an important part of the curriculum and training of new conductors. It could lead the multifaceted human intelligence toward the consciousness of personal expressive styles and the search for strategies to complete them.

About the Author

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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