A REHEARSAL FOR REVOLUTION: THE HYBRID PERSONA OF THE GRADUATE STUDENT TEACHER

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ABSTRACT

This mixed-form essay examines the graduate student teacher (GST) by utilizing Augusto Boal's concept of the spect-actor. This theatre concept is used to illuminate two distinct aspects of the graduate student-teacher's persona: first, their initiation into theoretical literacy, and second, their opportunity for vigorous critical, even revolutionary activism. An embedded graduate student essay explores the author's personal GST experience within a larger frame of current U.S. university employment trends and against the author's current university experiences and performances. This work asks: What kinds of power do GSTs command? What kinds of power are they bound by in their simultaneous, hybrid performance of students and teachers? And, in light of the growing numbers of part-time and temporary faculty teaching at U.S. institutions, what are the ramifications of a shrinking minority of university faculty (the tenured) wielding primacy in institutional policy making and the creation and maintenance of the social and workplace culture? The essay concludes by exploring these issues at the author's institution, the University of Guam.

KEY WORDS

Academic labour, Augusto Boal, Graduate student teacher, Literary theory, Spect-actor, United States, University employment trends, University of Guam

Introduction

One of the most pervasive ways in which workplace personas are created and replicated in the academic institutions of the United States is through the mechanism of the graduate student teaching apprenticeship. Throughout the United States, college and university graduate programmes offer seats in their classrooms and places on their teaching faculty to carefully selected students. In fact, some graduate programmes will not admit a student who is unwilling or unable to simultaneously take up the undergraduate teaching mantle. Across the nation, these graduate student teacher (GSTs) take on a majority of the teaching workload for the multi-section, lower-level, general and foundation courses.

According to the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), the trend of employing "contingent" faculty is increasing: "Non-tenure-track positions of all types now account for 76 per cent of all instructional staff appointments in American higher education." These contingent faculty are paid per class and seldom receive cost-of-living wages, family or emergency leave benefits, or health care. Further, in their 2015 publication, "Background Facts on Contingent Faculty," the AAUP expresses concern that this employment shift "damages student learning, faculty governance, and academic freedom." They conclude their report with the recommendation "that no more than 15 percent of the total instruction within an institution, and no more than 25 percent of the total instruction within any department, should be provided by faculty with non-tenure-track appointments."

While the AAUP article includes graduate student teachers as part of the "contingent faculty" category, GST experiences are cited as indicative of these problems. Is it possible though, that GSTs are an exception? Are they treated more fairly, or receive more training, mentoring, or support than other paid-per-course employees? Do they have opportunities to engage in and influence the democratic processes of their employer intuitions?

REFLECTIONS ON A GST EXPERIENCE

In July of 2001, I was offered a graduate student teacher position at Miami University of Ohio. I eagerly accepted and began inhabiting that two-headed identity of the student-teacher. This hybrid creature exists in an interstice—a teacher, but one with training wheels: "Teaching Associates may have full responsibilities for classroom instruction, but they are under the supervision of regular faculty of the department" (*The Graduate School*). They are not fully-empowered, independent teachers, nor are they unrestricted students: "[T]eaching Associates with half-time duties must register for a minimum of ten graduate credit hours each semester of appointment, and not more than fourteen" (*The Graduate School*). In this both and neither location, I struggled with how to simultaneously nurture my professional voice and pedagogical philosophies, respond to the needs of my undergraduate students, fulfil my responsibilities to my peers and faculty mentors, and perform successfully in my own writing and research tasks.

According to The Association of American Universities (AAU), "Graduate students learn to teach and to conduct research by performing these activities under faculty mentorship. Apprenticeship teaching experiences [...] are extremely effective ways to teach prospective teachers how to teach" (12). I embraced the challenges of my GST position with a hope, shared by each new crop of GSTs around the U.S., that the apprenticeship would allow me to successfully compete in the job market upon the completion of my degree. However, not everyone agrees that graduate student teaching programmes are beneficial to the students or the academic departments. Critics have pointed out that, like other part-time and contingent faculty, GSTs are often "poorly paid, exploited, and ill-trained" (Summers). One scholar describes the plight of the graduate teachers using the metaphors of colonial oppression; they are: "children, serfs, prisoners, and slaves" (Crowley 127). This language certainly muddies the AAU's shiny picture of the GST experience.

ACTING [A] PART

While I do not doubt that GSTs around the nation experience a spectrum of workplace injustice, my research and writing here reflects on my own experiences and expresses my current optimism that GST programmes can be creative, transformative places in the academy. For me, this begins by asking what kind of power do GSTs command and what kind of power are they bound by? Part of an answer may be found in acknowledging the scripts from which a GST learns to perform his/her new roles and rehearses for the "real job"—the future, tenure-track professorship. Some

might argue that the GST persona is one that simply imitates the professional and pedagogical practices of academia, memorises and mimics, and thereby remains a passive, disempowered subject. The theoretical and pedagogical ideas of educational innovator and political activist Augusto Boal offer a way to challenge this limited and limiting perception of the GST experience.

In the Foreword of his book, *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1979), Boal explains that Aristotle's definition of mimesis had "nothing to do with copying an exterior model," but, rather, the "recreation" of that model (1). The book details specific methods to bring theatre to marginalised communities, and for using it as a tool to critically explore oppressive forces and collaboratively envision opportunities for intervention and liberation. Integral to this process is disrupting the division between actor and audience. Boal alters passive spectators "into subjects, into actors, transformers of the dramatic action" (122). He names these active spectators, "spect-actors." *Theatre of the Oppressed* delineates the participatory theatrical techniques of forum theatre, in which audience members help to select the script to be performed, are invited to stop a performance and make suggestions to alter character interactions, and finally, are encouraged to replace actors and demonstrate their ideas (139).

Two decades after the publication of *Theatre of the Oppressed*, Boal continued to explore the transformative potential of his forum theatre. In his book *Legislative Theatre* (1998) he writes: "Forum Theatre is a reflection on reality and a rehearsal for future action. [...] The spect-actor comes on stage and rehearses what it might be possible to do in real life" (9). A GST is a spect-actor: a person who both observes and participates in the academic institution. GSTs watch the performances of their professors and then choose whether to use those scripts in their own teaching performances, explore alternatives, and/or to rehearse pedagogies they will use in the future.

TALKING THE TALK & STAGING THE GST EXPERIENCE

Performance studies scholar, Deb Margolin asserts, "There is something terribly radical about believing that one's own experiences and images are important enough to speak about, much less to write about and to perform [...]" (36). Trusting Margolin's assertion, what follows here is a piece that I wrote as a graduate student at Miami University. Borrowing a writing technique used by American writer and academic N. Scott Momaday in his book *The Way to Rainy Mountain* (1969), I break the page into two columns, with personal essay on one side and a dramatisation on the other. In splitting the page, I mirror the bi-furcation of the GST persona, forcing the reader to also struggle to find meaning in the middle and across the student-teacher divide.

This student paper is also an application of Boal's forum theatre methodology. Specifically, my essay practises one of Boal's techniques for transforming a spectator into a spect-actor. Boal describes this transformation in stages. In each stage he includes various activities and exercises. One of these exercises is *simultaneous dramaturgy*, where an "invitation [is] made to the spectator to intervene without necessitating his physical presence on the 'stage'" (*Theatre* 126). This involves asking the spectator to "'write' simultaneously with the acting of the actors" (*Theatre* 132). I wrote this essay for a Performance Theory seminar. In the essay I exercise Boal's techniques by casting myself as the Protagonist and giving voice to what I perceive to be obstacles (antagonists) to my success as a student and as a teacher. I examine two distinct aspects of the GST experience: on the left, my initiation into theoretical literacy as a graduate student, and on the right, my opportunity as a university teacher for vigorous critical activism. Boal's methods offered me a framework to both demonstrate the content of my course, but also identify and articulate some of the anxieties I was experiencing in my hybrid role of student-teacher.

Scholars, activists, and performers alike understand that certain kinds of literacy(s) are necessary to not only fully participate within one's own community, but are also needed to travel outside that neighbourhood. For academics in my chosen field, the language of power is literary theory and a competency in this discourse is a prerequisite for full enfranchisement in this academic community; for other scholars, that authoritative discourse might be a legal or medical lexicon, or even the possession of multilingual language skills.

Scholars and performers agree that in order to earn respect and attract attention to their respective research, scholarship, or activism, they must speak the language of power. One scholar argues, "Legitimated theory typically delivers tangible social rewards to those who possess it" (Collins xiii). For some activists, the lexical currency is not academic or professional jargon but simply, English. In Guillermo Gómez-Peña book, Dangerous Border Crossers. The Artist Talks Back, he explains, "I choose to write this text in English because in order to fight a hegemonic model I believe we need to know and speak the language of hegemonic control" (255).

Despite arguments against what I like to call "theoretical nepotism," most scholars overwhelmingly assert that theory is a power tool. In a written conversation between bell hooks and Cornell West, West asserts:

Theory is inescapable because it is an indispensable weapon in struggle, and it is an indispensable weapon in struggle because it provides certain kinds of understanding, certain kinds of illumination, certain kinds of insights that are requisite if we are to act effectively. (34-35)

Additionally, one of the first tasks of an emerging field of discipline is to establish itself by distinguishing its methodologies, theories, and scholarship. This often takes the form of policing what is, or is not "x." What is or is not *ecocriticism*, for example.

"Performance is not just about what you say onstage, but about your desperate desire to say it, the quality and mystery of that desire; about your humanity" (Margolin 69).

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Andrea The Radical
Andrea The Liberal
Andrea The Graduate Student
Andrea The Teacher
Andrea the GST – The Spect-actor

The Graduate Student: In today's job market it seems as though theoretical literacy is a necessary form of academic currency. I want to become a competent member of this academic community so I can produce smart and competent publications to eventually secure tenure.

The Liberal: I realise that one of the most effective means to incite political changes is from the inside out. I will work within the system to slowly modify what counts as knowledge. You must know the rules in order to break them. I will not squander my luck at being born able-bodied and financially comfortable. I will act on my sincere desire to be articulate and useful as I load my tool belt and refine my skills.

The Teacher: I have a responsibility to the university to teach skills that will provide first-year students with the necessary

These examples give strong support for graduate curriculums that require substantial mastery of theory, or whatever authoritative knowledge or discourse governs the legitimation of knowledge in that field. Some scholars however, have scrutinised this privileging of theory within the academy. In Barbara Christian's essay, "The Race for Theory," she speaks out against the creation of vet another theoretical model (postmodernism) in what she calls the "race for theory." Christian is suspicious that theory can potentially reify hegemonic normative patriarchal practices. She explains, "I feel that the new emphasis on literary critical theory is as hegemonic as the world it attacks" (71). She argues that this race for theoretical literacy has subsumed the research and scholarship of minority literature and third-world writers at a time when this kind of research is so vital to the goals of multi-culturalism.

As a current graduate student who is struggling with the abstractions of theory, I find great comfort in an academic who asserts that I should be doing more than "quoting [theories'] prophets"; I should be putting the text central or grounding any kind of analysis in reality and practice (Christian 69). I am also persuaded by her argument that theoretical frames often become prescriptive. I know that I have been guilty of trying to fit a text into a favourite theory rather than exploring a text through an unfamiliar analytical lens.

When Christian asks, "for whom are we doing what we are doing when we do literary criticism?" I am forced to reflect on my own academic writing: will this work be inaccessible to my family? While I have come to accept that part of an education is an initiation into academic literacy, I can clearly understand Christian's argument that this discourse community is "exclusive [and] elitish" (74).

Christian is not the only scholar voicing these kinds of concerns about the potential risks of theory. Patricia Hill Collins

academic literacy to be successful in this environment. I would not want to pass a student who would potentially fail because they did not have a basic proficiency. Am I a kind of social Darwinist by helping to weed out students that have insufficient preparation? Letting a "clumsy" writer slide through my class would be a disservice to the student and to his/her future teachers.

Assignment Date: Sept. 17, 2001

Summary writing is a very useful skill that will help you collect information for some of your larger papers. Summaries can sometimes be tricky because you have to extract the most salient ideas from often very large texts. Summary includes ideas that the author has written and **not** your personal opinions of the author's main points or topics.

The Radical: The University is an institution that controls who gains and is refused access to power. Academia continues to reinscribe the same ideological social apparatus (Althusser) that sanction the exclusion of individuals who do not possess certain kinds of credentials, which are unequally available and often inadequate measurements. My complicitous critique or consciousness is born out of the apparatus and yet, I do not want the position of border patrol guard.

GST-The Spect-actor: A teacher needs to not only provide students with rhetorical tools to help them be successful at the university but also help them to recognise the value of expression and poetry within particular contexts. A student will be a more successful writer when they understand the rules well enough to know how far they can bend them before they break. I would consider myself a very successful teacher if I moved beyond the lowest common denominator training to also help students become more conscious writers who understand how to play with those skills to express their own unique perspectives.

writes, "[...] elites possess the power to legitimate the knowledge that they define as theory as being universal, normative, and ideal" (xiii). Too few scholars seem to wrestle with the problem of how performing academic personas through our speech and writing can be an elitist practice, which effectively polices the boundary of what gets counted as knowledge, who gets acknowledged as knowledge makers, and who has access to this knowledge through their training and educational experiences.

A system that seems inherently insular, hierarchical, and nepotistic, and yet here I am, clamouring for a seat at the table. David Cowles elucidates:

To speak authoritatively on literary matters in America one must possess certain credentials: a Ph.D. from a recognizes institution, a tenured professorship, a list of publications from approved journals or university presses, and so on. Those not meeting the requirements will not find a receptive audience, no matter how good their ideas. What's more, only certain kinds of statements about literary texts are taken seriously – generally those that follow

"approved" critical approaches. (128) As a GST in Miami University's English department I am expected to gain a proficiency in theory as part of my professional training. Miami University, in fact, would be negligent if it did not provide me with the opportunity to gain this vital job skill. However, I was troubled by the potential I had as a spect-actor to participate in a revolution, to challenge and critique the institution, if I was simultaneously complicit in maintaining the integrity of that border.

Augusto Boal's work in the *Theatre of the Oppressed* does not deal with the same kind of issue; the basic literacy that he hopes to teach is not risky; this education will not inadvertently support the controlling, oppressive governmental institutions it wishes to overthrow. Perhaps this is where

GST-The Spect-actor: Extra Credit

Date: Oct. 1, 2001

In your summary papers, I found myself correcting many of you for putting in your own opinions. I wrote things like: "This sounds like a value judgement" or "Interesting analysis but it does not belong in a strict academic summary." As I wrote these comments I began to question *why* opinions have not been allowed in this kind of writing. Why was I trained to write like this? Is this kind of writing just a regurgitation of someone else's ideas and writing that does not value a reader's response?

In a memo (1.5-2 pages singlespaced), I'd like you to think about the summary paper assignment and whether or not summary writing has any real value. If you think it is, in fact, valuable, I'd like you to present what kind of skills you learn in this kind of assignment and where might you use these skills later in your life. If you think that summary writing is a vestige of an outdated attitude about education, I'd like you to rewrite the assignment criteria and include an analysis as to why you think that you should be allowed to include your own ideas as well as the author's into a summary. Can you think of any examples of this kind of writing to support your claim?

I look forward to hearing your feedback on these questions. I will use your input in designing this assignment in the future.

The Graduate Student: When I invited my students to re-write the script for their summary assignment, I invited them to perform as spect-actors with me.

the metaphor of the spect-actor helps to reveal the limitations of my position in the academy. As a GST who is only teaching foundation course material, I can offer some tools but not everything needed to empower my students to substantively challenge the academy. Perhaps this too is another reason to continue to acquire those legitimated credentials.

Semiologist J.L. Austin wrote an influential text documenting the potential of utterances to perform an action. In *How to Do* Things with Words, Austin outlines the criteria for constative and performative utterances. Further, scholar Della Pollock identifies how writing can also function as a rhetoric that acts performatively: "Writing that takes up the performativity in language is meant to make a difference, to 'make things happen"; She continues, "[...] performative rhetorics [...] involve the reader not as the subject/object of persuasion of a given reality claim but as a cowriter, co-constituent of an uncertain, provisional, normative, practice" (95). I wish to create the conditions where you, the reader/audience/participant help to perform this declaration.

I invite you to read the "Declaration of Protest" out loud. Feel free to substitute words, gesticulate, assent or disagree. In my participation of this performance, my recognition of the fluid, performative, and playful aspects of my growing academic persona, I commit to the sincerity of these words and will take pleasure in being held accountable to them!

GST-The Hybrid-The Spect-actor: Declaration of Protest

I recognise my precarious location as a nearsighted intellectual with narcissistic fantasies and will walk carefully when I propose new theory or create the next seminal neologism.

I recognise the power of institutions to placate and diffuse differences of opinion through the guise of liberal thinking.

I believe that there is power in confusion, fractures, gaps, interstices, heteroglossia, the new mestiza, the cyborg, and strategic essentialism.

I will not become trapped in the "race for theory"; although I will speak it beautifully, I will speak with a difference.

I will strive to be conscious, conscientious, compassionate, and opinionated.

I submit, by performing and displaying this declaration, that I am an academic with an attitude!

GST: A GROWING FORCE FOR CHANGE

As a GST at Miami University of Ohio, I was ready to embrace my position as a spect-actor, to the full extent of the metaphor, and place the academy, the controller of my labour, in the crosshairs of my revolutionary zeal. As much as I was enamoured by the idea of putting my beliefs on the line and taking my place in a history of movement-makers, union organisers, and radicals, I discovered that I was not brave enough to jeopardise my dream of that faculty parking sticker and other benefits of being at the top of the academic hierarchy. Playing nice earned me rewards: a dissertation fellowship and a great relationship with my faculty mentors and programme administrators. Yet, no students I taught have stayed in contact and I have no way to gauge what

kind of effect I may have had. At that time, I did not realise how resilient the institutional systems were and how safely or how far I could explore my independence even within the confines of standardised, mandated curriculum. I do not regret the way I protected and invested in my graduate degree by guarding my reading, research, and writing hours; however, I now know I could have risked a bit more, inserted and supplemented the curriculum, and played with transgressive teaching pedagogies.

How safe, how open, is the academic environment for active and ambitious critique from the bottom? I doubt that Miami University or many other institutions feel threatened by the idea of a graduate student revolution, or in my case, a manifesto performed in a course examining transgressive theatre and a pedagogical challenge to "objective" summary writing. As I reflect on those experiences now, I find I can understand my tempered activism, once again through the work of Augusto Boal, in particular, a term emerging out of his concept of invisible theatre. This form, which entailed the performance of theatrical scenes in public spaces, but without overtly signalling their scripted nature, emerged in part to hide these risky political expressions from the "cop-in-the-street," and protect both the actor and the spectator, who became an unwitting participate in the performance (Schutzman and Cohen-Cruz 3). When applied in contexts where the "oppressor" was not a clearly identifiable person, system, or institution, not a "cop-in-the-street," but an internalised self-policing materialising out of personal experience, training, and socialisation, the term transformed to "cop-in-the-head." Looking back, I have come to believe that my biggest barrier to more radical challenges in my student-teacher persona, was that internal police presence.

Many graduate student teachers and contingent faculty have not bowed to either the cop-in-the-streets or the cop-in-the-head. Beginning with the formation of the Teaching Assistants Associations (ATT) at the University of Wisconsin in 1966, unions solely invested in graduate student advocacy are increasingly tackling employment contracts and working conditions of GSTs around the nation (Czitrom). These unions—like the Graduate Teaching Fellows Federation (GTFF), a University of Oregon contingent of 1,500 individuals—have successfully intervened in contract negotiations for job security and medical equity issues (Thomason). For at least forty years, some of these vulnerable university employees have been able to safely organise for wage, medical, and leave benefits. Challenges to mandated, standarised curriculum are harder to discover as these often happen within committees rather than in more public and transparent venues. I have no doubt though, that many a GST, adjunct, emergency hire, or short-term instructor across the nation is expressing their irritation to this erosion of academic freedom, an erosion by virtue of limitations and controls being placed on their curriculum choices in ways that are not experienced by their tenured colleagues. Compliance to a standard curricular seems even more important to a teacher whose employment is contracted by year, semester or only course by course.

As U.S. institutions increasingly replace tenure-track professor lines with contingent employees (including GSTs, part-time, and full-time, non-tenure track), university workplace culture, and the related personas created within that culture will inevitably shift. Young Americans pursuing Bachelor's degrees will predictably encounter graduate student teachers or other contingent faculty members in their foundational or lower-level required courses. This shift will have a mixed impact dependent on a variety of factors. In the case of the GSTs, sometimes only months after the completion of their own Bachelor's degrees, they may be handed a roster, a textbook, and imbued with borrowed authority to educate and assess. Some institutions provide a significant amount of training, mentorship, assessment, intervention, and accountability of their contingent faculty; while others, due to mismanagement, over enrolment, or the low status of lower-level courses, fail to provide adequate support, encouragement, and intervention.

There are both risks and rewards to the growing percentage of GSTs and other contingent faculty in academia. On the one hand, these part-time or temporary employees can be dynamic, dedicated, knowledgeable, and conscientious contributors to their employing institutions; on the other hand though, these same teachers may become quickly discouraged and less generous with their time and talents if they are not recognised and compensated fairly. If more opportunities for meaningful participation, equal representation and voting authority, and some measure of job security are not quick to materialise, universities need to be aware that they are creating a growing under-class, a group who will mobilise and do what they must to be heard.

As universities dissolve or replace tenure-track positions with part-time jobs, GSTs will have more opportunities to teach high-level, foundation courses. They may also be able to strategically position themselves for future full-time or tenure jobs (if they exist anymore) at those same institutions. Perhaps as institutional teaching needs grow and become, ironically, dependent on faculty who are themselves dependent (contingent), GSTs will recognise their individual and collective power in a way that I never did. In the graduate students I am able to teach, I will certainly encourage, incite, and advocate in any way I am able.

THEN AND NOW: THE SPECT-ACTOR AS TENURED PROFESSOR

The performance theory graduate paper I shared earlier, and the reflections and clarity it generated have stayed with me. Then and now, these ideas reinforce my sense of wanting to prove something, not only to myself, but also to my current students and colleagues as well as my former academic mentors. Augusto Boal was right when he wrote, "The practice of these theatrical forms creates a sort of uneasy sense of incompleteness that seeks fulfilment through real action" (*Theatre* 142). What shall I act, enact, in the final stages of *this* written performance?

Well, on the other side of the GST experience and tucked cosily into my own tenured university faculty job, I have the chance to reflect on that early GST apprenticeship, my feelings of disenfranchisement as well as my optimism of challenging and changing from the bottom. What happens now that I am a tenured professor and intentionally or not, benefitting from my position as one of the privileged minority? How do I support my own institution's contingent faculty and graduate student instructors? Further, how does my institution's specific colonial legacy complicate the hierarchy of the institution?

The University of Guam was founded in 1952 as a teacher's college. Faculty members were imported from The Ohio State University with the mission of creating a pool of professional, local teachers to populate the island's primary and secondary schools. This colonial legacy has had a powerful impact, but one that is conscientiously present in the institution's contemporary mission, which includes fostering local leaders and prioritising local scholarship.

The University of Guam has not been immune to U.S. academic employment trends. The creation of tenure-track jobs is not keeping pace with the growth of student enrolment, which leads to a growing percentage of contingent faculty, often classified as "emergency hires." All of the concerns expressed by the American Association of University Professors apply to us at UOG as well: contingent faculty do not have full access to medical and family leave benefits and many cannot support their families without additional outside employment. These disparities amongst teaching faculty inevitably damage student learning, course quality, and workplace moral. However, the University of Guam's growing use of contingent faculty has an added issue connected to its colonial history. Because it is not yet a Ph.D. granting institution, more of the tenure-track faculty are imported rather than home-grown or returning Guamanians. This means that even faculty with vigilant cultural consciousness and humility are still participants in a continuum of colonisation. Tenure-track faculty voices and opinions are given more weight than the contingent faculty, a group

with a larger percentage of local and regional people. The imported faculty, like myself, are a minority who are un-democratically privileged with the power of a majority, and in this way the institution re-enacts a measure colonial violence. Whether intentionally or not, when the faculty does not mirror the student demographic, especially on an island territory of the United States, the potential for a productive and collegial work environment is diminished.

As a University of Guam tenured faculty member who regularly teaches and mentors public school teachers and graduate student teachers, I have the opportunity to resist my privilege. By engaging the spect-actor in myself and my students, I place my anxieties and concerns "out there." When externalising an internal monologue, one must be prepared for the potential for uncomfortable future dialogues. But for now, I will hang my Declaration of Protest on my office door and I will continue to encourage the graduate students to leave the island for their PhDs and then return and take the tenure-track job I'm holding for them.

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