“Hutilaxda’xwla yaxs laxdamulasan’s kwâliskwal’yakw’wâla yaxwa ka’e Edward Curtis ka sbadzwegile’s…”
“Listen, everybody, about the time our old people danced for Edward Curtis so that he could make a film…”

Curtis’s Landmark 1914 Silent Film of Pacific Northwest First Nations Culture:
Restored, Re-evaluated, and Framed by a Live Orchestral Arrangement of the Original Score and a Performance by Descendants of the Indigenous Cast
In 1914, famed photographer Edward S. Curtis (1868-1952) produced a melodramatic silent film entitled *In the Land of the Head Hunters*. This was the first feature-length film to exclusively star Native North Americans (eight years before Robert Flaherty’s *Nanook of the North*). An epic story of love and war set before European contact, it featured non-professional actors from Kwakw̓ak̓a’wakw (Kwakiutl) communities in British Columbia – a people already famous at that time for their spectacular visual culture and performances. The film had gala openings in New York and Seattle in December 1914, where it was accompanied by a live orchestral score composed by John J. Braham (1848-1919), best known for his work with Gilbert and Sullivan. Curtis supplied Braham with c.1910 wax-cylinder recordings of Kwakw̓ak̓a’wakw songs; despite advertising claims, however, little if any of this source material made it into the score. Critics wrote in rapturous terms about the power and beauty of the film, the *Seattle Sun* calling it a “great production – like a string of carved beads, too rare to be duplicated.” And yet, *Head Hunters* was a financial failure, quickly overlooked and barely preserved. In 1947, a single copy arrived at the Field Museum after being picked out of a Chicago dumpster; these damaged and incomplete reels were re-edited by Bill Holm and George Quimby and released in 1974 as *In the Land of the War Canoes*, featuring a new soundtrack recorded by Kwakw̓ak̓a’wakw consultants at the time. At some point, a few deteriorating clips from another copy found their way to the UCLA Film & Television Archive, and the all-but-forgotten score was filed under another name at the Getty Research Institute.

Today, we are privileged to present a restored copy of *In the Land of the Head Hunters*, reunited with its original orchestral score and framed by descendants of the original Kwakw̓ak̓a’wakw cast. This event is significant for a number of reasons. Since the 1970s, Curtis’s film has been treated as a documentary, adorning the halls of natural history and anthropology museums, and being criticized for its staging of savage scenes from a “pre-contact” past as if they were part of the everyday life of contemporary tribal communities (as was also the case with his photography). Yet the film was intended as an innovation in feature film – one meant to stand out in the already crowded field of popular Westerns or “Indian Pictures” of the time – because of its exclusive use of “authentic” Native actors, its on-location shooting, its dynamic camera work, its spectacular color tinting and toning, and its ambitious musical score. The film truly represents an active, artistic collaboration between two dramatic traditions: the rich Kwakw̓a’wakw history of staged ceremonialism and the then-emergent mass-market colossus of American narrative cinema.
Rather than documenting Native life in 1914, *Head Hunters* documents a moment of cultural encounter between Curtis and the Kwakwə’wakw actors and consultants who were performing Curtis’s scripted version of their own past for the camera. Some aspects of the film do accurately depict Kwakwə’wakw culture, such as the artwork and many of the ceremonial dances; others include forms of technology – the plank houses, cedar bark clothing, and massive dugout canoes – that were clearly recalled but in waning use in 1914 as people adapted to Euro-Canadian life. The most sensational elements of the film – the head hunting, sorcery, and handling of human remains – reflect much earlier practices that had been long abandoned, but which became central elements in Curtis’s spectacularized tale. Yet some activities were never part of Kwakwə’wakw culture. For example, Curtis borrowed the whaling practices (and the rented whale!) from neighboring groups for what seem to have been purely dramatic reasons.

Even more noteworthy than Curtis’s embellishments, though, is the film’s portrayal of actual Kwakwə’wakw rituals prohibited in Canada at the time of filming under the federal Potlatch Prohibition (1884-1951), a law intended to hasten the assimilation of First Nations. Despite this legislation, the dances and visual art forms – hereditary property of specific families – were maintained through this period and transmitted to subsequent generations, including the performers on the stage here tonight. An extension of their previous engagement with international expositions, ethnographers, and museums, the film in part helped the Kwakwə’wakw evade the potlatch ban, maintain their expressive culture, and emerge as actors on the world’s stage. By adapting their traditional ceremonies for Curtis’s film while refusing to play stereotypical “Indians,” the Kwakwə’wakw played a vital role in the development of the most modern of commercial art forms – the motion picture.

Like his photographs, Curtis’s film was originally meant to capture a “vanishing race.” Instead, when resituated within the history of motion pictures and informed by current Kwakwə’wakw perspectives, this landmark of early cinema is recast as visible evidence of ongoing cultural survival and transformation under shifting historical conditions. For nearly a century and counting, *In the Land of the Head Hunters* has offered a filmic lens through which to reframe and re-imagine the changing terms of colonial representation, cultural memory, and intercultural encounter.

— Aaron Glass, Brad Evans, and Andrea Sanborn (Executive Producers)
U’MISTA CULTURAL SOCIETY – STATEMENT OF PARTICIPATION

La’misan’s Kwak’wala speaking peoples – the Kwakw’kwa’wakw, represented by the U’mista Cultural Society – are indeed indebted to Edward Curtis for his work in documenting some of our traditions in this early film. To see our old people as they looked in those early days is very special. We continue to learn by watching the dance movement and the expert paddling in the film. The young people you see in this live performance are descendents of the people you see in the film. Because they have all been initiated and named in our ceremonies, they bring a true spiritual connection with them in their singing and dancing.

Chief William T. Cranmer
Chair, U’mista Cultural Society

www.umista.ca
Underneath the fur robes and the clip-on nose-ring in this picture, Edward S. Curtis managed to capture something he probably didn’t expect. When I gaze at this photograph, I don’t see Princess Naida from his film *In the Land of the Head Hunters*. Instead, I see youth and beauty and a long life still to be fulfilled. I look into this profile of my grandmother and see the wrinkles that I knew for most of my life absent. At the same time, I see the waves in her hair that she always carried with pride. I gaze into the photo and see a 17-year-old daughter of a chief whose cultural taboos restricted what she could and couldn’t do on film – so much so that Curtis was forced to hire two additional women to also portray the princess in his film. I recognize that although she is wearing a costume, she carries a sense of poise and grace that belies her age. I see in her the eyes of a woman who would live to 99 years of age and who, as a true princess amongst our people, would live up to her ancestral name *U’magalis* or “Noblest over All.” I thank Curtis, not for capturing his vision of our people before European contact, but for capturing a moment in time in my grandmother’s life.

– *Nagedzi* – Andy Everson (K’omoks First Nation)

In 1993, I had the honour of being invited to visit with George Hunt’s granddaughter Margaret, who played the heroine Naida (along with two others) in Edward Curtis’s *In the Land of the Head Hunters*. In very old age, she still took pleasure in sharing stories about Curtis’s time at Fort Rupert and, by doing so, turned my understanding of the past on its head. Curtis expected everyone to be serious. In his view as a white man of his time, they were living a life-and-death situation as Indians. He discovered they laughed at Fort Rupert, just as people do everywhere in the world. Once, when the canoe in a scene hit a rock, everyone laughed so much that Curtis pulled the film out of the camera in anger. Ever since then, I have sought to interpret the past from as inclusive a perspective as possible, keeping in mind that, while we are not alike, neither are we so very different from each other.

– Jean Barman (Professor Emeritus, UBC)

These comments are excerpted from an exhibit developed by the Museum of Anthropology and the First Nations Studies Program at the University of British Columbia to complement this event series. For the entire exhibit, please visit the Curtis project website.

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SYNOPSIS.

To gain power from the spirit forces, Motana, a great chief’s son, goes on a vigil-journey. But though the tribal law forbids the thought of woman during the fasting, his dreams are ever of Naida; her face appearing in the coiling smoke of the prayer-fire he builds high upon a mountain peak. To foreordain the anger of the spirits he must pass a stronger ordeal. He sleeps upon the Island of the Dead, then hunts and kills the whale; and raids the clustered sea-lion rookeries, a whole day’s paddle out to sea. Naida is wooed and won by Motana, and splendid is the wooing. But Naida, with her dowry, is coveted by the Sorcerer. He is evil, old and ugly. Waket, Naida’s father, fears the baleful “medicine” of the Sorcerer, and also stands in dread of the Sorcerer’s brother, who is Yaklus, “the short life bringer,” and the head-hunting scourge of all the coast. Waket promises Naida to the Sorcerer. So then begins this Indian Trojan war.

Motana and his father, Kenada, and their clan resolve to rid the region of the head hunters. In their great canoes they attack the village of the Sorcerer and Yaklus. The Sorcerer’s head they bring to prove his death to those who believed him “deathless.” But Yaklus escapes. After the wedding of Motana and Naida, with pomp of primitive pageantry, and dancing and feasting, in which the throngs of two great totem villages take part, Yaklus attacks and burns Motana’s village. Motana is left for dead. Naida is carried away into captivity. Wild is the revelling that follows at the village of Yaklus. The beauty of Naida’s dancing saves her life. Naida’s slave boy, a fellow captive, escapes. His message brings Motana, who rescues Naida by stealth. The raging Yaklus pursues. Motana, hard pressed, dapes the waters of the surging gorge of Hyal. His canoe flies through, but Yaklus is overwhelmed and drowned.

Special rendering of Curtis Film Drama for the benefit of the Yorkville Social Centre at Carnegie Hall
Tuesday Evening, Feb. 9th, 1915, at 8.30
Seats, 25¢ to $2.00  Boxes, $25.00

World Film Corporation
Lewis J. Selznick, Vice Pres.

Calling the Guests to the Wedding

Courtesy Bill Utley
www.curtisfilm.rutgers.edu
“IN THE LAND OF THE HEAD HUNTERS”

ORIGINAL FILM EPHEMERA

Seattle Times, December 6, 1914

Seattle Times, December 13, 1914

Courtesy Bill Utley

www.curtisfilm.rutgers.edu
FILM RESTORATION
Neither of the two sources for surviving footage from Curtis’s film is complete. About three reels of scenes from the original six reels are held by the Field Museum; these were significantly re-edited and released in 1974 as *In the Land of the War Canoes*. UCLA holds about one reel’s worth of missing footage from an original nitrate copy, primarily from the end of the film. In total, then, the current restored version represents about two-thirds of Curtis’s original film. For this restoration, a few short shots were lengthened, some out-of-frame shots re-framed optically, and – when Field Museum and UCLA footage overlapped – portions of shots from each were intercut to secure as complete a final product as possible. Some frames were removed to eliminate the worst jumps and splices for a smoother presentation. Because many of the original intertitles were short or badly degraded, all titles were re-created digitally. Missing main and end titles were re-created in the manner of other World Film Corporation releases of the time. Missing intertitles were derived from original scenarios, plot synopses, and other sources. Images from approximately fifty missing shots were obtained from single frames submitted in 1914 to the Library of Congress for copyright purposes. A color tinting and toning scheme for the entire film was derived from the UCLA nitrate.

– Jere Guldin, film preservationist (UCLA Film & Television Archive)

EDWARD S. CURTIS BIOGRAPHY
Edward S. Curtis (1868-1952) is America’s most famous photographer of Native Americans. Most Curtis images circulating today were taken from his monumental work, *The North American Indian* (1907-1930), a twenty-volume photographic record and ethnography of many tribes of the western continent. Curtis’s work was supported by some of the wealthiest and most influential men of his time, including George Bird Grinnell, J. P. Morgan, and Theodore Roosevelt. Always a showman, Curtis also undertook commercial endeavors to raise funds for his book series. Prior to making his film, he put on elaborate “musicales” or “picture operas” combining magic-lantern slides, a lecture, and an original musical score. Though critically acclaimed, *In the Land of the Head Hunters* (1914) sold few tickets and Curtis quickly abandoned it, later selling his copyright for the film to the American Museum of Natural History in 1924. After continuing for some years with the photography project, Curtis made what seems to be a natural progression to Hollywood, where he worked for Cecil B. DeMille taking still photographs. In the 1930s, Curtis liquidated all assets and materials relating to *The North American Indian* book series, selling them to a rare book dealer in Boston.

SCORE ARRANGEMENT
The music for *In the Land of the Head Hunters* (held by the Getty Research Library) includes a manuscript full score mostly in John Braham’s hand, and a set of instrumental parts made by a copyist at the Arthur Tams agency in New York. Although the publicity material claimed the score was influenced by Kwakwaka’wakw music, one would be hard-pressed to identify any relation between the two. From his experience in the live vaudeville and operetta tradition, Braham wrote a string of 62 musical numbers to accompany a series of scenes. Braham must have had access to a scenario or outline of the film narrative since several of the movements have titles or notations referring to the action. The instrumental parts represent the primary source for the music as performed at the Casino Theatre in New York in December 1914, and they contain additional keys to the film action as well as notations of last-minute changes; 7 numbers were deleted entirely. The current arrangement can only be an approximation of the original, given missing musical elements (e.g. the conductor’s score) and an incomplete film. Today, matching the musical score to the projected film will largely depend on the conductor, as it did in the era in which the film originated.

– David Gilbert, score arranger and music librarian (UCLA Music Library)

JOHN J. BRAHAM BIOGRAPHY
John J. Braham (c.1848-1919) came to America from England in 1855. After touring as a virtuoso, he accepted the post of musical director of Pike’s Opera House in Manhattan, and later conducted the orchestra at the Howard Athenaeum in Boston. He was in charge of music at several New York and New England theaters, and in 1878 conducted the first American production of *H.M.S. Pinafore* at the Boston Museum. He was closely associated with Gilbert & Sullivan operas throughout his life, working primarily with the D’Oyly Opera Company. Braham also enjoyed some success as a composer, especially for vaudeville as well as popular and comic song. He collaborated with Edward Rice on the music for a *Hiawatha* play or pageant, and then wrote the score for the 1913 film, *Hiawatha: the Indian Passion Play*. Edward Curtis commissioned Braham to produce the score for *In the Land of the Head Hunters* in 1914.
The Gwa’wina Dancers are a professional dance group whose members represent many of the 18 tribes of the Kwakw’k’wakw First Nations from the central coast of British Columbia. Since 1999, our group has performed in Canada, the United States, Europe, and New Zealand. All dancers have permission from their Chiefs and extended families to perform the dances and songs we present. Each Gwa’wina dancer is initiated in Potlatch ceremonies, thereby earning the right to perform the dances and songs. In the current event series, many of the performers are descendants of the actors or participants in Curtis’s film. The dances are traditional, each telling a story or legend that is part of our rich heritage. We faithfully perform each dance as our ancestors did. We sing the songs as they were originally composed, in our Kwak’wala language.

For more information, please visit http://gwawinadancers.org

The following are descriptions of some of the dances that will be performed during the current event series (exact program may vary). They are drawn from those pictured in the Curtis film and from the genealogical inheritance of the performers.

Galsgamlila “First to Appear in the House Ceremony” – This ancient ceremony comes from the Kwagu’l of Fort Rupert and is a preview of all of the animals, birds, and supernatural beings that will be performed throughout the T’seḵa “Winter Season.” A noble man enters the house carrying the sacred treasure box that contains all the spirits of the dances. Four attempts will be made by the singers to call the spirits out of the box. On the fourth try – four being the sacred number of the Kwakw’k’wakw – the thin veil between the natural and supernatural will drop and reveal a glimpse of the great ceremonies to come.

‘Yāwītłalal “Welcome Dance” – This dance came to the ‘Namgis tribe as a dowry through marriage with a Nuu-chah-nulth tribe from the West Coast of Vancouver Island. Gilakas’ła – “Welcome.”

Hamat’sa “Cannibal Dance” – The Hamat’sa is the highest-ranking and most sacred T’seḵa “Winter Ceremony” of the Kwakw’k’wakw. It is the reenactment through song and dance of a young man’s possession by the dreaded man-eating spirit Baxwbakwalanuxwi. Through ritual, the Hamat’sa initiate is purified and tamed, thus bringing him back to his human state. The dancers who will perform here are initiated members of the sacred Hamat’sa secret society.

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Tlalkwalá “Ladies Dance” – To complete the purification of the Hamat’sa, the women are called to dance and cleanse the floor. Women in Kwakwaka’wakw culture are the life-givers and Chief-makers. The women wear button blankets – decorated with the crests and history of their families – which replaced furs and cedar-bark robes after European contact. The ladies listen to the words of the song and dance gracefully to the beat.

Kwan’wala “Thunderbird Dance” – The Thunderbird is the powerful ruler of the heavens. In many origin stories, lone survivors of the Great Flood prayed to the Creator for protection and were sent Thunderbirds. They would assist man in building his first house for shelter, and transform into humans to become first ancestors. The Thunderbird dancer will appear in supernatural form and then disappear behind the sacred dance screen. He will return in human form, just as the ancestors did when they founded the first clans.

Tuxw’id “Warrior Dance” – Tuxw’id translates as “the one who traveled.” This ancient dance comes from the warrior spirit Winalalaglis (Causing War Around the World), who takes away the initiates of his dance societies and brings them around the world in his magic copper canoe, bestowing powerful gifts and songs. In our winter ceremonies, these dancers are challenged to display their spiritual power and prove their worthiness.

Nan “Grizzly Bear Dance” – The grizzly bear is the protector of the tribes that have the right to wear the bear as their crest. One clan among the ‘Namgis tribe descends from a strategic marriage between a Thunderbird-man and a Grizzly Bear princess. As dowry, the ancestor received the songs, dances, names and crest of the great bears. The dancer will appear in animal form and then retire behind the curtain. He will return to dance calmly in human form.

Długwala “Wolf Dance” – This dance imitates the wolves. In the beginning of time, a ‘Namgis ancestor named T’sil’walagama’yi went to seek supernatural power by fasting and cleansing. He soon appeared riding on the back of a huge supernatural wolf. His tribe tied four canoes together and set out to capture him, after which he shared his treasure in the form of a dance that became known throughout the coast.

Hamasalal “Wasp Dance” – In Kwakwaka’wakw culture, the wasp is respected for its intimidating qualities. Young warriors often vision quest to seek the spirit of the wasp in hopes of gaining it as their personal guardian spirit. The dancer aggressively flies around the floor and stings people. The victims are paid with property to soothe their wounds and also to validate the honor of being bitten by such a small but powerful insect.

Me’dzawesu’ “Salmon Dance” – The Salmon Dance is the dance of twins, the spiritual gifts from the Salmon People. This dance is the birthright of all twins and is danced to celebrate the uniqueness of twins and the greatest of our resources, the salmon. The dancers carry feathers (representing twins) and jump during the song (imitating the salmon during their life cycle while at sea).

Am’lala “Play Song” (Hana’łdaxw’la) – To celebrate the completion of special events, we have play songs that are fun and less serious. Everyone is welcome to join in. This song comes from the ‘Namgis and tells of the accomplishments of our ancestors and their success in the Potlatch.

Hálakas’lakala “Farewell Song” – This ancient song is said to be thousands of years old. It came to the people of Knight Inlet from a mountain people believed to be from the interior of British Columbia. After visiting and sharing songs, the interior people all perished in bad weather as they returned home through the glacial passes. All that remained were the beautiful songs they had left behind. This song eventually featured Kwak’wala words, and was transferred through marriage to the Lawit’sis (Turnour Island) people, who own it today. Háłakas’l - “Farewell.”

All dance descriptions written by Hilamas (William Wasden Jr.), Artistic Director of the Gwa’wina Dancers and Cultural Program Coordinator for this project.
Executive Producers:
Aaron Glass is an anthropologist and visual artist working primarily with Kwakwą’wakw First Nations in British Columbia, Canada. His doctoral dissertation, along with a companion film In Search of the Hamat’sa: A Tale of Headhunting (www.der.org), examines the ethnographic representation and performance history of the Hamat’sa or “Cannibal Dance.” Glass has published articles on various aspects of First Nations art and performance on the Northwest Coast, and is the co-author, with Aldona Jonaitis, of the forthcoming book, The Totem Pole: An Intercultural Biography (University of Washington Press). He is presently collaborating with the U’mista Cultural Centre to create a digital database to document the Kwakwą’wakw collection in the Ethnological Museum Berlin. In September 2008, Glass will take up a dual fellowship at the American Museum of Natural History and Bard Graduate Center in New York City.

Brad Evans is an Associate Professor in the English Department at Rutgers University, where he teaches classes in 19th and early 20th century American literature and culture. His research has focused on the historical relationship between art and ethnography, and his essays on this topic have appeared in Visual Anthropology, American Quarterly, ELH, and Criticism. In his book, Before Cultures: The Ethnographic Imagination in American Literature, 1865-1920 (Univ. of Chicago Press, 2005), Evans questions how artists, authors and social scientists understood and produced notions of social difference in a period before the anthropological notion of culture existed in the English language. In addition to ongoing work on the history of anthropology and cultural theory, he is currently writing a history of the avant-garde in American literature that takes as its jumping off point the short-lived vogue for “little magazines” published in the U.S., Paris and Japan in the 1890s.

Pudlás (traditional name of Andrea Sanborn), of the Ma’ámtagila, is a member of the Kwakwą’wakw First Nations. As Executive Director of the U’mista Cultural Centre since 2002, she is mandated to ensure the survival of all aspects of the cultural heritage of the Kwakwą’wakw. In the past decade, she has managed a number of significant projects, including the creation of a replica Kwakwą’wakw village in the Netherlands, the rebuilding of the Alert Bay ceremonial Big House following its destruction by arson, and the expansion of the U’mista Cultural Centre itself. In addition, she has long facilitated the distribution of Kwakwą’wakw First Nations arts and crafts around the world. More recently, Sanborn acted as the Primary Negotiator for the repatriation of a transformation mask from the British Museum (which is now exhibited at the U’mista Cultural Centre on a long term loan), and was invited to speak on a panel at the 2008 Athens International Conference on the Return of Cultural Objects to Their Countries of Origin.

Pre-event Slide Show: “Staging Edward Curtis: Photographs by Sharon Eva Grainger” (organized by Sharon Eva Grainger, Aaron Glass, and the U’mista Cultural Centre)

Pre-event Audio: c.1910 wax cylinder recordings by Edward Curtis (courtesy Archive of Traditional Music, Indiana University at Bloomington); contemporary recordings by the Gwa’wina Dancers and friends (courtesy the Gwa’wina Dancers and the U’mista Cultural Society)

Cultural Program Coordinator: Hilamas (William Wasden Jr.)

Gwa’wina Dancers: William Wasden Jr., Edgar Cranmer, Norman Wadhams, K’odi Nelson, Kevin Cranmer, Jacob Smith, Dustin Rivers, Ian Reid, Gilbert Dawson, Andy Everson, Eli Cranmer, Dorothy Pewi Alfred, Lauren Smith, Caroline Rufus, Maria Wadhams

Regalia Design: Kwakwą’wakw artists: Beau Dick, Wayne Alfred, William Wasden Jr., Don Svanvik, John Livingston, Sean Whonnock, Calvin Hunt

Regalia Manager: Maxine Matilpi

Artistic Advisor and Lighting Designer: Dave Hunsaker

Additional Staging Advice: Jim Simard, Lucas Hoiland, Toby Corbett

Production Assistant (West Coast): Art Brickman

Program and Advertising Design and Production: Joanne White and the UBC Museum of Anthropology

Website Design: John Amodeo

Project Advisor and Videographer: Colin Browne

Additional Research Advice: Bill Holm, Ira Jacknis, Peter Macnair, Deanna and Jerry Costanzo, Bill Utley, Hugo Zeiter

Assistance to Aaron Glass: Adam Solomonian, Laura Friesan, Phil Dion, Helen Polson

Assistance to Brad Evans: Jenna Lewis

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Overall Project Coordination: U’mista Cultural Centre, Alert Bay, BC

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John Braham Score: Research Library, The Getty Research Institute (850111)

Performance Edition: David Gilbert, UCLA Music Library; support from the Getty Research Institute

EVENT VENUES & SPONSORS

Los Angeles (June 5-7, 2008): Getty Research Institute, UCLA Film & Television Archive, Autry National Center

Seattle (June 10, 2008): The Moore Theatre, Seattle Theatre Group, Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture, Seattle International Film Festival


Chicago (November 7, 2008): The Field Museum


New York City (November 14, 2008): American Museum of Natural History, Margaret Mead Film & Video Festival, Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian, Rutgers University, New York University

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