
The Giant, the Draughtsman and a Beautiful Landscape

A contemplation of representation, deconstruction and displacement

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Dear reader,

Nowadays, it seems time moves more quickly than ever and is more valuable than in any other epoch, so I appreciate and thank you humbly in taking your time to read my thesis. On the subject of time, my wish, among others, is that my thesis is, in a manner of speaking, able to transcend time by pulling together various historical and contemporary instances and observe them on one same surface. I hope that I have succeeded in doing so, or that this work may represent a start in doing so.

Isidora Krstic

ABSTRACT

This diploma thesis presents a contemplation of notions such as displacement, nostalgia, home, desire and exoticism through the deconstruction of a sixteenth century myth. By shedding historicity, I analyse a myth as a mirror of a particular society's way of thinking and feeling and as a mode to produce narrative and meaning. The myth, as a representational tool, is juxtaposed with a critical deconstruction of contemporary representational methods.

This thesis traverses fields and tries to re-think the interdisciplinary boundaries of anthropology, ethnography, philosophy and history of science; and asks how the work can be positioned within contemporary artistic discourse.

The placement and contextualisation of the project work within the Viennese Museum of Folk Life and Folk Art forms part of the concept.

'A symbolic voyage which is a meditation on the restlessness and exile'

Bruce Chatwin, "In Patagonia"

Introduction

In order to lead you into this thesis, the research I have done, its conclusions and the work you will soon see, I need to unfold the motives behind the topic that has for me been a focal point of interest and a driving factor for many years.

There is a certain difficulty in trying to name things or attempting to squeeze various notions and concepts under one umbrella. I suppose this represents a fitting analogy that when we try to define things too closely, or force definitions upon them, there is not enough room for all and some are bound to end up miserably wet in the rain. I would rather present the set of coincidences, occurrences and meetings that led to passionately pursue something that in the beginning I couldn't even name, but in the end, became clearer, came to represent one of the most personal parts of my being.

Following impulses, bits and pieces of seemingly unconnected instances and intuitive thoughts that I could not clearly define proved to be a more than fruitful ground to begin conducting research.

A (Research) Question

The work starts by asking several questions which I try to explore through theoretical research and practical work. The following question attempts to sum up both previous projects as well as my engagements within the thesis itself:

Can I be nostalgic for a place I have never been to?

In this question, I would like to highlight several terms here: 1) Nostalgia, defined as a feeling of homesickness, longing for or missing something that was once present, 2) Place, nostalgia as connected to a specific or non-specific space and 3) The paradox of non-presence. In the paradox of having feelings for an unspecific, imagined and anticipated place or situation lies a deeply engrained need to understand and explain the concept of *home*.

How do we make sense of the surroundings into which we are brought? Since our birth, we try simply to make sense of things we encounter and that form our daily lives. In order to do so, we build connections with objects by building a narrative and 'drawing' a mental landscape which we try to keep under control as much as we can (i.e. *The house has a roof which is red. There is a blue sky in the background etc.*).

Things we cannot define precisely enough either become a good reason to dedicate lifetimes in (re)search for clarity or they become bases for the creation of fictitious stories and myths. Either of these are creations of narratives, which provide an insight into the relation of our inner expectations and how we perceive, process and represent occurrences from our surroundings.

In relation to this, the concept of home and our relation to a place as that from which we originate from also feeds into our perceptions of other, 'foreign' places and for that matter not only places, but people and the formation of cultures, specially cultures of *otherness*.

Sometimes we long for home, if we know what that is. Sometimes we can long for home and do not know where it is and, finally, we sometimes long for places other than home, places we have not yet been to, but are experienced as places of desire and even necessity. This is not to be mistaken with travelling, although the search could, but need not necessarily, include the act of travelling. We try to formulate and define places as to draw a certain map of our own world and relationships including both physical and metaphorical places where we have 'been' and places we are 'going'.

Previous Work

In relation to the question posed above, the term 'exotic' poses itself as an imminence to be discussed, as it relates to our perception of otherness. This term has for a long time occupied both my mind and my work and I have on many occasions tried to deconstruct it and map out its problems.

My previous work "The Exoticiser" (2013)¹ is an exploration of this concept, an attempt to delineate the issues it contains and a "patent" to be used in their resolution:

When deconstructing an exotic entity, two parts are perceived: on one hand the main substance – object and on the other, the attribute or adjective attached to this object. Together they create a new physical as well as semantic construction which is perceived as being exotic (i.e. tropical fruit). For an object to become exotic, a contextual shift has to happen: geographical or cultural relocation in most cases. In addition, contrasting climate zones contribute to a higher degree of exoticism. In defining a

1) Created within the course of Sen. Lect. Bernd Kräftner's Transdisciplinarity and Representation, and the course project: "Human Necessities, 15 Steps to a Wonderful Patent", 2013, presented in the Governor's Palace in Brno, Czech Republic

system as to how an object is “inaugurated” into this category, I try at the same time to break this myth and offer a conceptual contraption for the cause.

The *exoticiser* takes the form of a terrarium, an object already intended for the purpose of housing an exotic display or environment. It provides a conceptual, mental space, where any supposedly ordinary object conceived inside of it becomes exotic. The changing LED light provides the choice of a specific contrasting “micro-climate” – according to the particular object. [Image A]



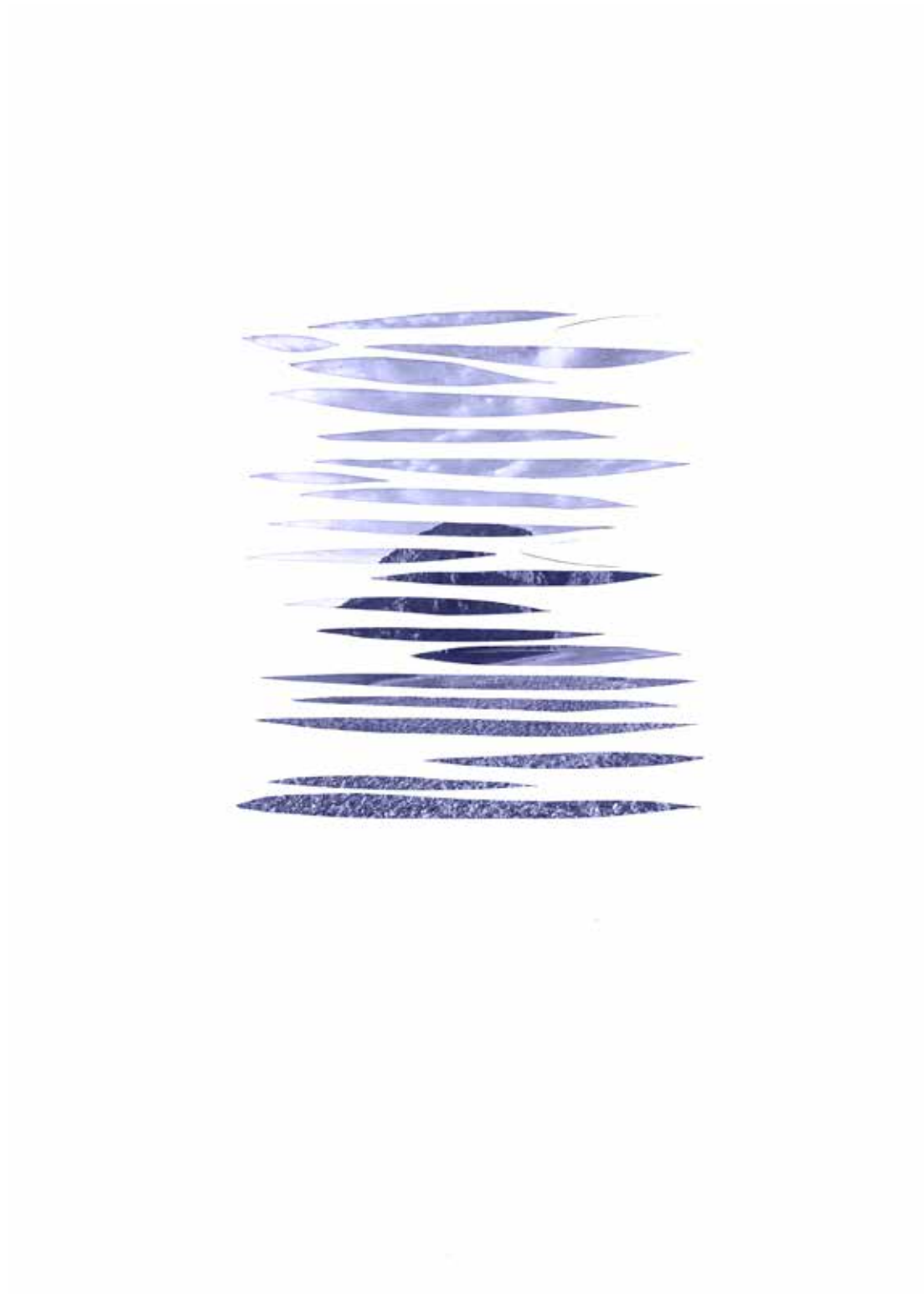
[Image A] Isidora Krstic, *The Exoticiser*, 2013, terrarium, sand, alternating “rainbow” LED lights.
Exhibition view: Human Necessities, 15 Steps to a Wonderful Patent, Governor’s Palace, 2013,
Brno, Czech Republic

Throughout time, especially from the 16th century on, notions of the exotic represented a strong motive in collecting and forming collections of objects. The exotic, perceived as something of value, also lead to the preservation and contemplation of objects in a certain context – a pillar in the foundation of the first modern museums.

In relation to this, a recent work of mine titled *Fernweh*² [Image B], referenced the tourism industry and act of travelling and seeking different and exotic places for

2) Isidora Krstić, *Fernweh*, 2015, collage, magazine cut-outs, cut paper, series of 20 drawings, 21 x 29.7 cm

tourism. Using photos taken from holiday/travel brochures, which I got by visiting Viennese travel agencies, I alluded to the desire which these photos are meant to incite, and the frustration that arises as a consequence of not being able to travel to these places. The frustration is also a result of the desire/fulfilment paradox that once we are able to arrive at a place of desire, we cannot experience fulfilment, as the act of longing carries within itself potential, personal projections and expectations/fantasies that once fulfilled cease the excitement that existed. Manipulating these photos is a symbolic gesture and a play with this meaning, sometimes breaking down the collected photos to illegibility and abstraction.



[Image B] Isidora Krstic, *Fernweb*, 2015, series of drawings, photos from travel brochures and cut paper

The Cabinet

Near the conclusion of my previous studies in painting in 2009, I attended an art history course taught by Prof. Jelena Todorović who has an in-depth understanding of the Baroque era. Attending her course, dedicated entirely to this era of art history, I came to learn about the cabinets of curiosities.

At roughly the same time, I got to know about the “1st International Travelling Biennale of Tehran”, curated by Amirali Ghasemi, which aimed to showcase works by Iranian artists in various venues in Europe that would otherwise not be permitted to be displayed in their home country. The problematic of this exhibition was so inspiring that it motivated me to initiate an exhibition of theirs in Belgrade.³

This travelling biennale in its very concept defined by French co-curator and artist Lise Chevalier, represented works in the form of a cabinet of curiosities, that would not only present Iranian artists but in addition include international artists; in this way the pure ‘exotification’ of the Middle East would be avoided by opening a discussion between roughly a hundred contemporary positions.

The idea of the cabinet of curiosity had already taken hold of a significant portion of my interest and I began to explore further. It was at this time that I started learning more about the implications of culturally-oriented perspectives. Any given object represented in one of these private collections could have spanned from categories such as natural history, geology, ethnography, archaeology, religious or historical relics, works of art, and/or antiquities.⁴

The very definition of a place of origin and the relative distance from this specific place often defined how an object was perceived. The cabinets of curiosities were heavily European in appearance and were tied to wealthy and powerful figures (who were subsequently known as collectors).

The choice of objects was defined by their role in the respective collections – and was very often based on the degree of an object’s *exoticism*. The expansion of overseas trade provided a larger influx of such objects which contributed to creating a developed market.

3) 2009, Magacin MKM, Belgrade, where I was involved in through independent cultural association (NKA/ICA, run by curator and art historian Biljana Tomic).

4) Francesco Fiorani, reviewing Bredecamp 1995 in *Renaissance Quarterly* 51.1 (Spring 1998:268-270) p 268

The most probable reason to collect was to possess objects of different types of value, mostly informational and additionally of public interest, which would create market value, and thus wealth and power.

At the same time, to view collecting as the sole accumulation of power would be too vague and overly simplistic. Whether as a consequence or purpose of the 16th-19th century collections, in their poetic essay on collecting, Finders, Keepers, Steven Jay Gould and Rosamond Wolff Purcell note the following:

In attempt to make sense of this seemingly senseless and curiously compulsive activity, commentary on themes of collecting often focus on issues of scarcity and value, on the amassment of objects as a vehicle for the accumulation of wealth and/or power. But it is all too easy to ascribe motives of self-interest to this passion to gather - to view collecting as an act of hoarding, of taking for one's self when, in fact, to assume the mantle of gathering for aftertime can just as easily be viewed as a self-less if not sacrificial act.

When we speak about the exotic, we are confronted with many paradoxes and problems. The exotic in itself bears the danger of a defined standpoint of speech from where another point is looked at and almost mutely observed. At the same time, one must allow oneself to fall into this trap in order to better understand and deconstruct the term and its meaning.

Spatial and temporal shifts are responsible for our perception of the exotic. For example, the spatial shift would be a geographical distance i.e. Europe and Australia; where a temporal distance can occur with or without the geographical distance but requires different time stamps associated to a single object.

On Otherness

In discussing missions to acquire exotic objects, I would like to draw a connection between Bruno Latour speaking about the past missions to attain precise drawings of maps from around the world:

...What is, for the former, a drawing of no importance that the tide may erase is for the latter the single object of his mission. What should be brought into the picture is how the picture is brought back.⁵

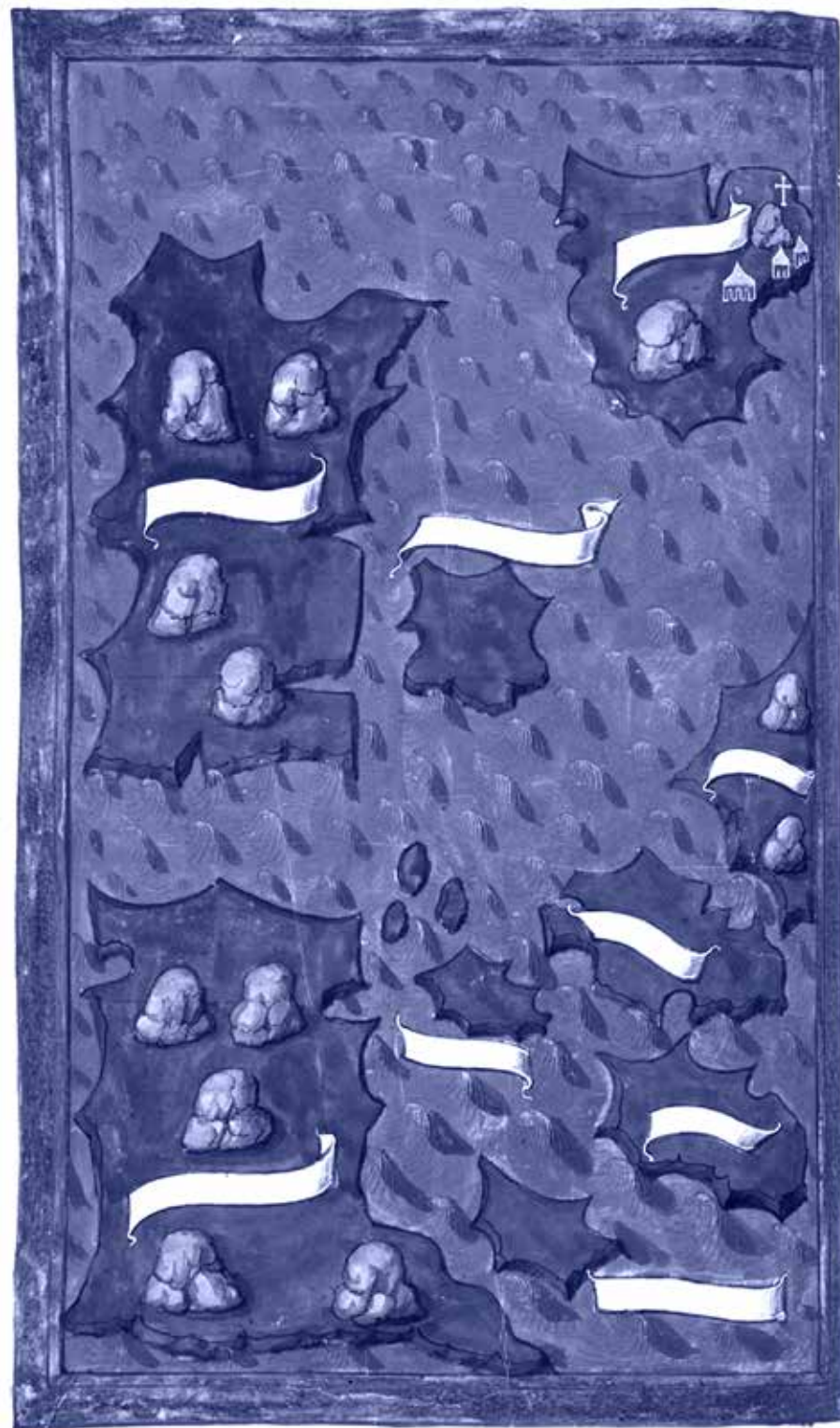
This quote not only explains what was looked for on long distance hauls across the world, it also gives insight into a certain type of politics of information acquisition, how it is transferred and mediated and finally its subsequent 'life' in a different cultural reality. What an image means in one culture, serves a different function in another.

*Could we say that myths are also products of encountering
seemingly foreign circumstances coloured by producing a link between the
expectation and reality found?*

In order to be able to disseminate the success stories of conquered territories and acquired goods, the necessity to build a narrative is ever so present. Not only in re-telling the story but in explaining and giving meaning to the daunting unknown. It would be too simple to say that myths originate purely out of the fulfilment of expectations or from the filling-in of gaps in the unexplained. Myths can represent our deepest ingrained fears played out before us as theatre, while the role of spectator provides us with a certain amount of comfort and control.

As a metaphor and representational tool the purpose of which is the deconstruction of several notions such as *exoticity*, pursuit of the unknown, otherness, desire and finally narratives, I have chosen the myth of the Patagon giants, which came into being during Ferdinand Magellan's 1520 voyage.

5) Latour, Bruno, *Drawing Things Together*, from *Representation in Scientific Practice*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England, 1986



[Image C] Illustration from "Journal of Magellan's Voyage", ca. 1525

Author: Antonio Pigafetta, ca. 1480/91-ca. 1534

Source: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University Library

Chapter I

Magellan, Magalhães, Magallanes

Allow me to take you nearly 500 years into the past. The year is 1520, the well-known Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan sets out on an expedition under the flag of the Spanish crown to find a westward path to the Indonesian archipelago of the Maluku Islands, known at the time as the "Spice Islands".

This expedition was one of many European expeditions launched in the sixteenth century, initiated and executed in the name of various monarchs and monarchies, most notably the Spanish and Portuguese. These expeditions and the next three centuries are grouped under the loosely defined historical term "The Age of Discoveries". In this phrase, the term 'discovery' reveals to us, quite explicitly, a multitude of cultural interpretations and meanings of travel partaken for a specific cause. This was not only true five centuries ago, but is also true today, though the term now describes scientific as well as geographical exploration. When we speak of this period, we cannot omit that it was very soon followed by heavy-handed colonisation and subordination of indigenous societies (more on this later in the text).

To discover can broadly be defined as the act of finding by one who explores, one who sets out perhaps without knowing what is to be found. In this case, whether the end goal is known is not relevant. The very motive to embark on an exploration is the desire to prove viable or disprove the promises made by stories, accounts and fairy tales of what a certain place represents. An uncertainty almost certainly leads to the action of waving away the fog and seeking out clarity, for whatever reason.

Here I would like to make a small digression and point out that the motives for sixteenth century expeditions should be seen as an extremely complex interaction of players and relationships that extend far beyond the exploration of the world. What I rely on in telling this story, which is currently the focus, is a number of mostly historical accounts that I have to believe in order to be able to narrate a meaningful construction to my reader.

The action of *believing*, which does not exclude a critical eye, is essential when dealing with historical data. What I want to quite explicitly point out is that this thesis and my approach to it is not about the struggle to prove and/or disprove various historical accounts. Instead I seek to create room enough to analyse and contemplate

them and to see what happens when we bring forward various accounts, their interpretations and when we finally compare and juxtapose these factors regardless of their temporal or spatial stamp.

Apart from the need for knowledge as a human necessity and method to stay out of the frightening dark of the unknown, the hope of finding a multitude of miraculous and valuable objects represented by far the biggest motive to set out on a quest, such as an attempt to circumnavigate the world. Hope and belief are terms and concepts which go hand in hand here and are crucial for pushing forward explorations. If I hope, then a part of me believes that what I hope for is plausible. If I believe, there is hope that my efforts will be worthwhile and justified.

‘New’ territories, objects, condiments, valuables and information were just some of the things hoped for. The first private collections of these objects would, as mentioned before, turn into the first modern museums created by collecting, preserving and storing objects of natural curiosity – *naturalia*, scientific specimens – *scientifica*, precious and rare art works – *artificialia*, ethnography – *exotica* and lastly, inexplicable, miraculous objects – *mirabilia*. There are many types of these collections and many motives for their foundations. Some were sparked by pure fascination and a desire to possess unusual and awe-inspiring objects. These would be collected and also put onto display for close acquaintances and important figures to enjoy and be entertained by.

The monetary value of these objects would also rise in correlation to their rarity, value to the collector, market value and sometimes degree of strangeness.

Finally, stories of distant indigenous societies and wondrous myths presented information as a valuable asset which power structures could display and toy with in front of a chosen public.

The Magellan expedition, as a process, bares much symbolic value in representing the formation and definition of the term culture. The very perception of physically distant territories as ‘other’, leads to delineation and estrangement. The very reason for conducting the voyages is seen through the gesture of reaching out and placing an eye that observes. With this voyage and many others to come, only a temporary eye would be placed, where journals filled with many detailed accounts of what was seen and experienced were put together later.

A need to maintain the eye and keep the flow of information without any discontinuation could be a reason for the formulation and creation of various contemporary

media which allowed to maintain close connection to distant places. Let’s just take for a brief example today’s live panorama and landscape web cameras (webcams) that continually transmit images to the absent observer. In this way, even without being present, the observer receives the fulfilment of experiencing and even having a certain amount of control of an urban, rural or other setting of choice.

Maps are peculiar things

Maps are peculiar things! How we usually see them throughout history is that they develop in time from imprecise, almost illustrative, allegoric, fantasy-land maps into the hyper-precise maps we have today such as the Google Satellite images or Google Maps. What we often fail to notice on older maps such as Antonio Pigafetta’s unnamed map is that the map then was not what it is today in terms of function [Image C]. If today we use them mostly for navigation and finding our way around the world, in other words, information; the map of the 16th century represents firstly an account of what, but not exactly how a terrain is to be found in a specific place. The maps of Pigafetta with the blank titles speak of territories yet to be claimed and present the unmediated colonialist demeanour.

Lastly, a map might have little functionality and may serve to present a narrative account of a certain voyage. It is sometimes impossible to examine a map without the temporal shift. At any given time, if we point to two places, we are tempted to measure out the distance in time between the two spots. This act almost certainly calls for asking how we get there, by what means etc., building up a storyline.

In relation to a map as a narrative account and representational tool, I bring up a contemporary photograph of a Patagonian landscape [Image D]. What do we get when we juxtapose a historical map, almost 500 years old and a recent photo?



[Image D] Landscape in Patagonia, Argentina. Image: Ignacio Ortiz Vila (2012)

A) In the case of the map, the person behind the drawing is the “camera” interpreting a scene much bigger than themselves. And more so, there is an obligation to interpret and make a series of decisions in order to illustrate.

B) In the case of the photograph, the camera is the person, as it assumes the role of an interpreter.

In case (B) we freely allow the camera to do the job of the interpreter. We can influence the meaning of this interpretation by setting the parameters of the camera. In this way, we do have some control over the outcome of a photograph. My aim here is not to undermine the role of the photographer. The focus of the problem is that we usually end up with an immense amount of details which are more illustrative than interpretative, as would be the case in (A).

Photographs are more able to help us maintain our memories of specific moments that have passed. They are the most used tool for inducing nostalgic moments. They offer spaces which are never alike the moment we have experienced them, but help us reminiscence and again experience pleasure in the act of longing.

Chapter II

A Sizeable Myth

Ferdinand Magellan’s voyage consisted of a sizeable fleet numbering seven ships. Accompanying the voyage as a journal-keeper was an Italian named Antonio Pigafetta. This highly intriguing figure I use as the basis to point out the division of cultures and as a metaphor of the early-baroque European perception. Pigafetta was in fact the eye of Magellan’s expedition and the language, style and choice of what he was documenting⁶ reflects the perceptions and representational values of the time.

We can only imagine what the members of the fleet were feeling on the long months after they set out across the vast Atlantic Ocean, equipped with the best technology of the day. The only guidance to their expectations of their travels were incomplete stories, which formed the crucial narrative in mapping out the temporal continuity of their action. With the will to confirm or disprove various accounts, I assume the alluring excitement that sparked the imagination of the average crew-member could stretch quite far, as to provide a line to follow instead of the more common perception of the pitch-black territories gradually being uncovered and ‘enlightened’.

Let us try to imagine for a second such a situation. In order to do that, we could draw a parallel to contemporary outer space explorations. Although there have been many attempts to give plausible theories explaining our universe in detail, our limitations draw lines in what and how we can know it. The size of our human body in comparison to the universe represents the most frustrating limitation upon which we build our technological instruments in order to be able to stretch out our eyes, our ears and our limbs.

Magellan’s ships were vessels in which a group of people were able to overcome the vastness of the ocean. The collective effort to steer these vessels also represented a collective will being executed in the name of a monarch and as an indirect consequence, his own will to do as he deemed fit.

What happened when the fleet reached the southern stretch of the eastern coast of South America in 1521, draws together all the seemingly unconnected paths of interest I have taken during my research on this topic.

6) Antonio Pigafetta was one of the rare survivors of this voyage who made it back to Europe. The whole account of the voyage, starting from Europe and stretching over a period of more than two years was published in 1525 in Paris in a highly poeticized book, *Magellan's Voyage Around the World, A Narrative Account of the First Circumnavigation*.

The ships docked on the shores and according to Pigafetta's account, the crew saw people on the shore who were quickly invited to meet the captain of the ship.

But one day (without anyone expecting it) we saw a giant who was on the shore [near today's Puerto San Julián, Argentina], quite naked, and who danced, leaped, and sang, and while he sang he threw sand and dust on his head. Our captain [Magellan] sent one of his men toward him, charging him to leap and sing like the other in order to reassure him and to show him friendship. Which he did. Immediately the man of the ship, dancing, led this giant to a small island where the captain awaited him. And when he was before us, he began to marvel and to be afraid, and he raised one finger upward, believing that we came from heaven. And he was so tall that the tallest of us only came up to his waist. Withal he was well proportioned. . . . The captain named the people of this sort Pathagoni.⁷

This 'first encounter' is documented on many later European illustrations and represents a small European handing a piece of food to an extremely exaggerated tall woman with a baby in her hands [Image E]. What Pigafetta indeed later wrote in his journal was that they had encountered a population of giants, who were hence after named the *Patagons* or *Patagonians*.

It seems that myths do not originate purely by false accounts or wild imaginations. They almost always have a background. The likely background in the case of the Patagons was a book published just seventy years before Magellan's voyage. The name Patagon represents a terrifying giant and appears in *Primaleon of Greece*, which is the English title for the translated version of one of the several sequels of the medieval sagas *Amadís of Gaul*.⁸ There are also numerous stories about giants stemming from European folkloric traditions as well as religious writings that might have influenced this perception.

Lastly in connection to the etymology of the word "Patagonia", as presented in Chris Moss's "Patagonia: A Cultural History", it is said that "Another, more remote, possibility is that Patagonia comes from Patac-Hinia, which in Quechua – the language of the Incas – means "mountain regions".

7) Pigafetta, Antonio, *Magellan's Voyage Around the World, A Narrative Account of the First Circumnavigation*, translated and edited by R.A. Skelton, Dover Publications, INC., New York, 1969

8) "This book, published in 1512, was the sequel of the romance "Palmerín de Oliva," much in fashion at the time, and a favourite reading of Magellan. Magellan's perception of the natives, dressed in skins, and eating raw meat, clearly recalled the uncivilized Patagón in Vázquez's book." Carolyne Ryan, *European Travel Writings and the Patagonian giants: How Patagonia got its name* – among other things. Lawrence University Today magazine, Fall 2004

Why, I ask, would the apparently most plausible etymology of the word also be the most obscure one? The Eurocentric interpretation seems to prevail.



[Image E] 'English sailor offering bread to a Patagonian woman giant.'

Frontispiece to *Viaggio intorno al mondo fatto dalla nave Inglese il Delfino comandata dal caposquadra Byron* (Florence, 1768),

the first Italian edition of John Byron's *A Voyage Round the World in His Majesty's Ship the Dolphin*,

(London, 1767) [Rare Books Division]

The myth of a population of giants inhabiting what is now Patagonia in Argentina persisted for roughly the next two and a half centuries. If we take a deeper look into this and other myths of giants we are confronted with questioning the relativity of our size, as humans, and how our size shapes many of our perceptions, representations and how we come to terms with the world around us.

If we start just by looking at the geographical maps we use, or to that effect any graph that compresses data to a comprehensible size, the human is put into the position of a sort of a giant observing the world, sometimes in proportion thousands of times larger than the norm.

The myth of these giants is a collective creation of Magellan, the crew-members and most importantly, the journal keeper or “draughtsman”, Antonio Pigafetta who wrote and sketched the encounters, all influenced by prior knowledge, their expectations and cultural ‘othering’.

The native people encountered were in fact the Tehuelche who by archaeological evidence might have been slightly taller than the average European of the time. Such an instance provided enough material that when ‘brought back’ to Europe, the account was exaggerated and spread throughout the old continent. We could even say that when the myth of the giants came into being and started to live, that is when the Tehuelche and other native tribes started to die out, either from not yet encountered diseases brought by the Europeans or as a consequence of subsequent colonising missions.

A story of what we now perceive and can freely call a myth was at the time a newly found reality, an account probably made with no intention of mythologizing. To say that the myth resulted only from a desire to impress the waiting king might be too simplistic.

If we go back to the encounter itself, to what could in fact be seen as the encounter of a parallel world, an encounter to which nobody at the time could have been equipped to handle. The focus here is on the existence of a seemingly parallel culture, which is lived by humans, but without knowing of the other. This realization is perhaps why the other was exaggerated even more. It must have been impossible to believe, or in the same manner perceive, that what was expected to be the other, could in fact contain more similarities than anticipated. This realization called for a quick over-bridging, in the form of a myth whose purpose was to extend the minor differences into a compelling construction which could be categorized as *otherness*. The problem of subsequently reinforcing the perception of the *other* is also in continually doing so through a number of small but crucial decisions, which could be seen as the process of *othering*.

There exist many stories of giants that appear throughout our history. Giants appear in stories from all around the world, from myths that we

know about from centuries ago, to stories found across different religions, fairy tales and fables up until contemporary examples in literature and film.

Worth mentioning are some examples from cinema where giants appear, which have found their way to be iconic films. In most films, giants pose a certain threat. These films represent giants in a role which overpowers a certain society’s security, causing the people to act in a manner of ‘togetherness’ to overcome the threat. An example of these would be *Attack of the 50 Foot Woman* (1958, Nathan H. Juran) and others that were most notably popular in the 50’s. In others, giants are well-tempered and usually help people overcome obstacles that in normal circumstances they couldn’t. *Gulliver’s Travels Among the Lilliputians and the Giants* (1902) by Georges Méliès represents one such film.

Probably one of the most famous examples from literature is *Gulliver’s Travels* (full title: *Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World. In Four Parts. By Lemuel Gulliver, First a Surgeon, and then a Captain of Several Ships*).⁹ *Gulliver’s Travels* stands for a political satire. As many fictitious stories and myths, they present metaphors of our complex world and social systems, which could sometimes be better comprehended through these allegories. In Voltaire’s novel *Micromégas*, which left a profound mark on me having read it as a teenager, a gigantic person from another planet visits and travels Earth and gets to know people, concluding how complex they are.

There is a trilogy of books (not strictly for children) which I read throughout my childhood, and one of those was dedicated to giants and described many different myths and stories from different parts of the world.¹⁰ The book narrated stories of different giant-characters in a very realistic way, as if they really existed. In a way, I can say that I had discovered giants then and they return to my interest today. The linearity of an individual growing, physically and mentally developing and moving farther away from one’s childhood could be, if even for a moment, broken. What if we were, to take the different phases in our lives without the time gaps, and see them as a set of occurrences to which we give meaning?

9) Swift, Jonathan, *Gulliver’s Travels*, Benjamin Motte Ireland, 1726, amended 1735

10) David Larkin (Collaborator), Julek Heller (Illustrator), Carolyn Scrace (Illustrator), Juan Wijngaard (Illustrator), Sarah Teale (Author), *Giants*, 1979

I am attempting, with the myth of the Patagon giants and by referencing giants in literature and mythology, to also make a connection between how we create an image of ourselves, firstly physically and then in positioning our bodies in a social-identity network. If the large men, named giants are often used as metaphors to explain political and social structures of power, I tried to understand this phenomenon also by going back to my own childhood and inquiring where I might have seen giants in the first place.

Around the ages of 6-9, on many occasions I experienced a very peculiar feeling before I went to sleep. In the dark, I would get a feeling, seemingly out of nowhere, how I am huge and that my body was spilling over the bed. This would be simultaneously followed by experiencing myself as tiny, like a bug in the middle of the bed. I did not think much of this, but as I recently remembered, then researched the phenomenon, there appeared one study from the 1960s and some more recent ones from the 2000s which, to my surprise, defined this experience as macrosomatognosia. One cause of macrosomatognosia is stated as coming from heavy migraines which I had also frequently experienced at the time.

I mention all of these different instances in order to map out the different ways in which giants and giant myths could be perceived in relation to our own body and ability, and open these spaces for thought and analysis.

CHAPTER III

MIRROR, MIRROR



[Image F] Joseph Jacobs, Europa's fairy book (1916) New York; London: G. P. Putnam's sons

Having read through several of Michel Foucault's texts, the term heterotopia¹¹ came up as a compelling concept to define spaces of *otherness*. According to Foucault, a heterotopia is a concept in human geography which describes places and spaces that function in non-hegemonic conditions: these are spaces of otherness, neither here nor there, simultaneously physical and mental. The most illustrative example for such a space would be a mirror. A reflection in a mirror exists, but is intangible. It exists somewhere in reality but does not have all the properties of reality as we define it.

A utopia is, along these lines, a heterotopia. It is an image or idea, a parallel image of the world which is better than the world that we know. Every element we can think of connected to our society is simply – better.

11) Foucault, Michel, Of Other Spaces, Heterotopias, Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité no. 5, pg. 46-49, October 1984

Foucault's mirror could pose as a metaphor of the misplaced individual whose identity is always residing somewhere (out) there. This is an individual who anxiously searches for a place of residence for his/her identity, but cannot find it. The identity of this individual does not reside in a specific place, it is a metaphor; a heterotopia. Here I deliberately say that the individual searches for a place as if having a pre-existing identity. I argue that identity comes to light, when the circumstances are right and comfortable. When they are not, this produces a feeling of being misplaced induces a need to search for one's place, mostly characterized by restlessness, which carries with it the potential to move, displace and change. This feeling can put into motion a physical shift to displace oneself in search of a new identity or a need to free oneself and transmute hegemonic cultural influences and oppressive socio-political governing structures.

In relation to post-colonial theory, I am aware of the major work opus and profound influence of Gayatri Spivak in the field and beyond. In the last phases of my research, her perspective also offered a new perspective in how I critically analysed my own work. Her work *Can the Subaltern Speak?*¹² introduces the discussion and discourse of a post-colonial society and explicitly points out the problems of assumed roles, the language of the hegemonic culture and problems of the accountability of representation. The problem of the voice in terms of who and how one is allowed to form accounts is apparent in the discourse.

The problem of the voice was not apparent only in the post-colonial period but was instigated during the colonial period itself. While reading in parallel excerpts from Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, I came to realize a deeper perspective regarding the myth of the Patagon giants. How the account was formed on Magellan's expedition was that the 'giant' did not speak, he was not let to starting from the first moment. He/she was given a name, an 'it' and an interpretation. The attitude is that of the attempted almost unconscious coloniser. The giant was treated only as a body and nothing else, a physical and silent apparition! Not asked, not questioned, even less respected (Magellan abducted two men and took them on his further travels, only to have the men subsequently die on-board, as they were not immune to the diseases the Europeans brought). Their very existence and bodies were violated by labelling and,

12) Spivak, Gayatri, *Can the subaltern speak? Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (1988)

ultimately, silenced. Being fully aware of this discourse, I chose to take the direction of the problematic of mythology, representation and other previously mentioned notions, as I do not yet feel equipped to fully assume the post-colonial theoretical discourse as an integral and leading part of my work.

How does a heterotopia relate to the myth of the Patagon giants or Magellan's voyage? I want to hypothesize that the myth of the Patagons, as well as any other myth, is a heterotopia. Apart from being fictitious stories, myths are different from fairy tales in the sense of having strong connections to reality and mostly try to explain the origin of things we do not understand.

Myths tell us a lot about what the needs of a society in a specific timeframe are. They can serve as projection surfaces, where the imagination can run wild. A myth provides a certain comfort, as it provides a room of knowledge and also keeps the mind occupied and inquiring, with a degree of fantasy. If we want to look into any society and understand it better, we should look at its myths and stories that run back many generations.

*Mythology differs from real science only in that its object is not the world and its things but what man thinks about the world, the objects and itself. In that sense, it must be acknowledged that the mythologist breathes a somewhat more rarefied fire.*¹³

In introducing the concept of myth as a heterotopia, I also wish to present the myth as a key 'proprietor' of my project work. The perception of a myth as such opens a wide range of possibilities for interpretation and reflection on other notions that come into play, such as fantasy, desire, expectations, nostalgia and others which will be elaborated on in the next chapter.

13) Ruga, Lorenzo R, University of Santo Thomas, Phillipines, *Algirdas Julien Greimas' Semiotics and Mythology*, in citing Julien Greimas's *Of Gods and Men, Studies in Lithuanian Mythology*, trans. Milda Newman. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992

CHAPTER IV

WAS IST KUNST, MARINELA KOŽELJ?¹⁴

A reflection on the thesis project work



[Image G] Raša Todosijević, *Was ist Kunst, Marinela Koželj?*, performance, SKC Gallery, Belgrade

Photo: Miša Savić

In this chapter I will address the concept of the practical part of my thesis. The title of this chapter was borrowed from and references a performance by artist Raša Todosijević, one of his most often performed pieces, in which Todosijević continuously and aggressively shouts the titled question, at another person (usually a woman) who sits still in front of him. The piece connects totalitarian behaviour and builds a victim-torturer relationship, making irony of the current philosophical and theoretical question, “What is art?”.¹⁵ His work can also translate into any sort of totalitarian

¹⁴ *Was ist Kunst, Marinela Koželj?* (*What is art, Marina Koželj?*), Dragoljub Raša Todosijević (born 1945, Belgrade, Yugoslavia), 1978, performance

¹⁵ The Avantgarde Museum, A collection of Avantgarde Art and Artists: <http://www.avantgarde-museum.com/en/museum/collection/authors/RASA-TODOSIJEVIC~pe4525/>, author n/a

behaviour including that of colonialism, seen as a way to project expectations of the oppressor as to how the *other* interprets and thinks.

I am borrowing this question in order to explore the meaning of my piece in the context of contemporary artistic practice and in the art and science discourse. Having chosen to tackle a topic such as cultural shifts, I had to inquire deeply into the personal level of such an interest. In doing so, and as I have noted on a few instances, I passed through the process of unravelling and trying to understand all the elements and notions attached to this concept. I can say that a great part of the work represents a contemplation on various notions of interest, personal struggle and trying to find connections between various repeating concepts.

Having concluded my studies in Art and Science, I was confronted from the beginning by continually asking what the two are and how they are interrelated. Dissecting and deconstructing the two terms was essential to getting into any type of collaboration or project. Even if no clear answer was in sight, the act of re-thinking terms that are usually taken for granted immensely extended my understanding of how meaning is produced and relationships constructed.

Notable artistic influences

Here I will mention some of the most important artists and other figures that influenced my work. To be fair, the list would surely fill many pages, as I remain extremely receptive to the works of other artists. Many artists I have come across have made me and continually challenge me to re-question and re-think my own work and position. I consider those exhibitions seen up until each viewed film and book read that left a profound mark on me, a considerable influence.

From the visual arts field, I will mention a few of the most important ones for my thesis and will start from the most recent one, the retrospective exhibition of Lithuanian-American artist Vija Celmins on display at the Secession in Vienna (November 20, 2015 – January 2016). Her contemplative and meticulously executed landscape lithographs and other prints probe deep into the very methods of work (some works are printed from different states of the work/etching on the metal plate or stone), while others such as *Globe*¹⁶ moves into the field of representing the world as a globe, where her paper globe alludes to the fragility of knowledge and representation.

¹⁶ Vija Celmins, *Globe* (2009-2010), hand-constructed, hand-coloured photo polymer gravure from artist's drawings on Echizen Washi “Shikibu” Gampi paper, with wood pole, bracket and string

Victoria Vesna¹⁷ is perhaps the figure, along with her former students from the department of Design Media Arts who inspired me to pursue exploration in art and science. I met Victoria Vesna and a few of her then students, with whom I had also collaborated, in Belgrade in 2007. Finding like-minded individuals pursuing their interests in a field which was then quite obscure gave confidence to become a part of a larger conversation.

The solo exhibition of South Korean artist Anicka Yi in Kunsthalle Basel (2015) provides the viewer a gradual walk through diverse works which employ several senses. For instance, fried tempura flowers incorporated in an installation play with the notion of culture and visual representation. Her way of combining extremely contrasting media into a meaningful composition provides a strong statement on the limitlessness of media in reviewing cultural paradigms.

Lastly, the exhibition titled *BAROQUE BAROQUE* by Icelandic-Danish artist Olafur Eliasson¹⁸ provides a view into a re-contextualization of a baroque interior space. By creating different realities through spatial interventions, the viewer is presented with a reinterpretation of spaces as formerly perceived only through their history and tradition.

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What to expect and final words

My project work takes the form of an installation and for its presentation, I have carefully chosen the Viennese Museum of Folk Life and Folk Art. The contextualization of the work within the museum institution forms an integral part of the work's concept.

The chosen field of interest of my work roughly falls into the categories of social sciences/humanities, anthropology with references to cartography, the history of science and history. Contextualizing a work for me represents an element of the work which is as important as the content of the work itself, and is included in its concept. By initiating to exhibit the work in the museum, together with introducing a regular audience, I add several layers to the work, which also represents an immense challenge as to how to construct the work and what it should say.

17) Victoria Vesna is a media artist and professor in the department of Design Media Arts at the UCLA School of the Arts and Architecture. She is also director of the recently established UCLA ArtSci center and the UC Digital Arts Research Network.

18) Winterpalais des Prinzen Eugen, Vienna, 21.11.2015 – 06.03.2016

I hope that this work, involving artistic/interdisciplinary research, with its very placement within the museum walls and by fully becoming part of the institution's program, manages to open and re-think disciplinary and institutional boundaries.

The vestibule space on the first floor of the museum where the work is set represents an original baroque interior. One of the intentions of the work is to offer a reinterpretation of the baroque space and thought as well as a space which is not normally used as an exhibition space, thus residing physically and symbolically in between – between spaces, floors and disciplines.

The very method behind my work process is a deconstruction of visual material, both self-produced and carefully chosen found material by aiming at its semiotics and representational aspects. A commercial image of an anonymous beach, a contemporary image of Patagonia, nameless, historical and contemporary deconstructed maps and other crucial elements form between each other a dialogue. The visitor is lead through the exhibit-installation which attempts to offer a contemplation of various, sometimes contrasting concepts such as nostalgia, desire, fantasy, exoticism, paradise, culture/cultural shifts, colonialism, mythology, narrative, restlessness, seeking an identity, the concept of home, place specificity, travel and displacement.

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Here I come back to what was mentioned at the very beginning of this text and that is that the work in the end represents a personal contemplation. The previously noted notions are probably rooted in having experienced them from early childhood.

At the age of 4, the war in ex-Yugoslavia had just broken out, with the country falling apart. As a result, my parents decided to leave our home town, Belgrade and together with my sister, we landed in Johannesburg, South Africa. At the time, due to the heavy sanctions imposed on Serbia, it was a country that was relatively open to their citizens.

I spent the next seven years growing my roots and becoming South African, while sporadically feeling nostalgic for some place far away I didn't recall very well, which was called by many my home, however seldom I truly felt so.

After returning to Serbia where I stayed before moving to Vienna three years ago, I could never fully feel myself at home and it made me start to wonder whether there was ever such potential. Home was always somewhere there, something I had left, a

root of nostalgia but not being rooted, a shift, gradually fading memories, different landscapes, skies and languages.

The choice to work with a myth that originated in today's Patagonia, Argentina might seem random, but it came through the influence of a visit to Buenos Aires in the summer of 2015. Learning about Argentina's colonial and recent history, together with trying to understand its complex heritage and contrasting identities caused me to more deeply tackle the question of my own identity and start looking more closely into its layers. It was in Argentina where I saw that the past is treated with an immense amount of respect, value and importance.

Together with finding myself again in the strangely familiar southern hemisphere, these two elements subsequently led to going back to my time of growing up in South Africa. This analysis, which had its difficulties as it was mostly based on memory, turned out to form an apprehensive and natural link between the subject matter of my work and personal motives.

The experience of growing up in a former colonial country deeply rooted itself into my identity or the very absence of it. My whole existence remains an embodiment of displacement, alienation and restlessness. A number of my previous projects, including this one, could be seen as being driven by a critical analysis and general need to pry open these notions, which are attempted to be elevated by examination from a universal perspective. I hoped I have accomplished to do just that, or that this work may also represent the start of a long and substantial inquiry into the complex issues and importance of the discourse of identity production and in the end, a profound understanding of the wide array of methods with which interpretations and representations are formed.

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