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Puppets, Dogs, and Vegetarian Angels: Ecocriticism in Jakub Krofta's Polish Productions

Kasia Lech

Animals have been at the forefront of many current global legal, social, and environmental debates. Cutting down the rainforest and killing the animals' habitat, ritual slaughter, environmental impact of eating meat, the use of animals for entertainment and research, or recent cases of legally recognizing great apes and cetaceans as non-human persons, are only a selection of topics. The point of tangency between these debates seems to be the need to renegotiate human-animal relations.

Traditionally, animals functioned as “object of rights vested in their human owners but not as the object of rights against human beings” (EPSTEIN 2004: 144), as properties existing for the use of humans. Today the need to protect animals seems socially accepted. Many countries, including the European Union, have recognized the status of animals as sentient beings and introduced animal welfare acts to protect them (EUROPEAN UNION 2007: 49). However, the current public debates on ritual slaughter (for example WYATT 2015) or the recent protests of the French farmers against France finally legalising the status of animals as sentient beings (RFI 2015), show that the protection of animals becomes a contentious issue, when it goes against human rights, like a right to religious freedom or property. At the same time organizations, like the Nonhuman Rights Project call for further strengthening of animals’ status by legal recognition of animals as subjects of law that possess their own rights (NONHUMAN RIGHTS PROJECT 2013).

The above paragraphs do not attempt to convey the complexity of the debates on the status of animals. Instead, their purpose is to highlight that the renegotiation of the relations between humans and animals is at the crucial stage of its process; it also overlaps with key

global debates. The opening also functions as a brief contextualization to the discussion on ability of puppetry theatre to contribute to this process, which is my essay's main focus. I am particularly interested in how interactive relationships between the performers, puppets, and spectators can facilitate the renegotiation of relations between humans and animals in the theatre for young audiences. My analysis concentrates on the work of Czech theatre director Jakub Krofta in Polish puppetry theatres in the context of Greta Gaard's theories on ecopedagogy (GAARD 2009). The main purpose is to explore how the Czech director's creative use of puppetry techniques and aesthetics engages young spectators from Poland with global discussion on human-environment relations.

The two productions under examination have the human-dog relationship at their centre, as well as highlight issues of humans' interactions with other animals. *Daszeńka, czyli żywot szczeniaka* [Dashenka, or the Life of a Puppy] (an adaptation of Karel Čapek's famous story) was directed in 2011 for the Lalka Theatre [Teatr Lalka] in Warsaw. *Pacan - historia o miłości* [Pacan – a Story About Love] by Maria Wojtyszko was staged in 2012 by the Wrocław Puppet Theatre (WTL) [Wrocławski Teatr Lalek], of which Krofta is the Artistic Director. Both productions received excellent reviews. Pacan became one of the twelve finalists of the 19th National Competition for Productions of Contemporary Polish Plays [Ogólnopolski Konkurs Na Wystawienie Polskiej Sztuki Współczesnej] in 2013. However before the discussion can turn to the two productions, some cultural context is needed.

Czech puppetry practitioners in Poland

“In theatre the national differences instead of dividing are now connecting”¹ says Polish theatre critic Hanna Usarewicz at the end of her article on a significant presence of Czech and Slovak theatre practitioners on Polish stages (USAREWICZ 2012). In contrast to

¹ Unless stated differently, all translations from Polish are provided by the author of this article.

complex political and historical relations between Polish and Czech, Polish-Czech cultural exchange has been recently flourishing. Usarewicz talks about Slovak scenographer Eva Farkašová and director Ondrej Spišák (a frequent collaborator of Tadeusz Słobodzianek), Czech-Slovak theatre team SKUTR (Lukáš Trpišovský and Martin Kukučka), and Jakub Krofta. Usarewicz also highlights the importance of artists from previous generations: Josef Krofta and Karel Brožek, who from 2007 to 2012 was Deputy Artistic Director of the Silesian Theatre of Puppet and Actor in Katowice. One important name that Usarowicz omits is the late Petr Nosálek, a Czech director who created approximately seventy productions on Polish stages, the majority of which was for puppetry theatres (INSTYTUT TEATRALNY 2014a).

The names mentioned in Usarewicz's article suggest that the graduates of the Theatre Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts (DAMU) in Prague and its Department of Alternative and Puppet Theatre are particularly attracted by Polish theatre (for example Farkašová, Spišák, Trpišovský, Kukučka, Jakub Krofta); or perhaps their skills and imaginations are attractive to Polish theatre. The roots of that can also be traced back to the 1975 *Jánošík* co-created by three theatres: the Drak Theatre from Hradec Králové (Czech Republic), the Puppet Theatre at the Crossroads in Banská Bystrica (Slovakia), and the Puppets and Actors Theatre Poznań (Poland). According to the Drak Theatre's website the production about *Jánošík* (to put it very simply, a Slovak-Polish-Czech Robin Hood) was "the first international project in the modern history of puppet theatre" (KROFTA 2014). Both Josef Krofta and Brožek started their Polish artistic collaborations by directing parts of *Jánošík*. By bringing Josef Krofta to Poland, the production indirectly has brought many of the contemporary Czech and Slovak theatre practitioners to Poland.

Josef Krofta, until recently the head of the DAMU's Department of Alternative and Puppet Theatre, co-leads the course in Directing for Alternative and Puppet Theatre together

with Marek Bečka (DAMU 2014). He was one of the artists and pedagogues responsible for the cooperation between DAMU and the Puppetry Department of the Ludwik Solski State Drama School in Wrocław (PWST). The 2004 Massacre, devised by the students of both schools and based on folk ballads from the Polish-Slovak-Czech border region, became one of the first products of the DAMU-PWST partnership; Josef Krofta was amongst the supervisors. Massacre started SKUTR's collaboration with Polish artists; these days Trpišovský and Kukučka lecture at DAMU and bring their own students to Poland (USAREWICZ 2014). The scenographer, Jan Polívka, decided to pursue his career in Poland and, to date, created scenography for approximately sixty Polish productions in puppetry and dramatic theatres (INSTYTUT TEATRALNY 2014b).

Jakub Krofta's (son of Josef) work in Poland is another, even stronger, example of the 1975 *Jánošík*'s impact upon the collaborations between Polish, Czech, and Slovak theatres. Jakub Krofta, like Spišák and Farkašová, was invited to Poland by the Lalka Theatre in Warsaw. He came in 2006 to stage Josef Kainar's *Zlatovláska* [Goldilocks] as an already experienced director. His career started in 1993, when, as a student of DAMU, he directed the Spoon River Anthology [Spoonriverská antologie] for the Dejvice Theatre in Prague. The production was based on the collection of poems by E. L. Masters, under the same title, adapted for stage by Jakub Krofta and Marek Zákostelecký; it remained in the theatre's repertoire until May 1997 (DEJVICE THEATRE 2014).

By the time Jakub Krofta came to Poland, he had also directed his original – and perhaps his best known – production *Všechno lítá, co perí má* [Everything flies that has wings] presented in English as The Flying Babies (2000). The production, aimed at the audience of three year olds and older, tells a story (without words) about three infants looking for their balloon. To date, The Flying Babies had more than six hundred performances (WTL 2014a). The production has travelled around the world, including to Scotland (2003, Royal

Lyceum, Edinburgh and Eden Court Theatre, Inverness), England (2005, The Junction, Cambridge), Australia (2004, Windmill Performing Arts Season, Adelaide), and, most recently, Italy (2014, International Festival of Theatre and Culture for Early Childhood, Bologna). The Flying Babies was awarded prizes at the international festivals in Poland and Slovenia (DRAK THEATRE 2015). In 2008 Jakub Krofta became the artistic director of the Drak Theatre (DRAK THEATRE 2014).

In 2010 Krofta came back to Warsaw to direct *Wszystko lata, co ma skrzydła* [Everything flies that has wings], based on The Flying Babies, for the Puppet Theatre Guliwer [Teatr Guliwer] in Warsaw. His third theatrical collaboration with Poland brought him back to the Lalka Theatre and the 1975 *Jánošík*. As Krofta recalls, him and Ondrej Spišák – the Artistic Director of the Karol Spišák Old Theatre in Nitra [Staré divadlo Karola Spišáka] – were inspired by the 1975 project. They approached the Lalka Theatre and a Polish director Łukasz Kłos with the idea for a Czech-Polish-Slovak production performed by a multinational cast (KROFTA 2014). *Jánošík Janosik Jánošík* used the legend of Jánošík to explore national myths and stereotypes, showing, to bring us back to the opening quotation, that “in theatre the national differences are not dividing, but connecting” (USAREWICZ 2012). *Jánošík Janosik Jánošík* premiered in Čerchová (the birthplace of the historic Jánošík) in April 2010 and was performed in Poland, Slovakia, and Czech Republic (KROFTA 2014).

Collaborations with the Lalka Theatre led to another production; *Daszenka czyli żywot szczeniaka* [Dashenka, or the Life of a Puppy] premiered in May 2011. A year later, Jakub Krofta was announced the new Artistic Director of the Wrocław Puppet Theatre (WTL). During the summer 2012 he directed *Madame* by Antoni Libera (adapted for the stage by Maria Wojtyszko) for the Dramatyczny Theatre in Warsaw. His staging of Wojtyszko's *Pacan – a Story About Love* – was Krofta's first production as the Artistic Director of the WTL – that premiered in November 2012. The three shows mark Krofta's increasing

engagement with Polish audiences – young audiences in particular – not only in terms of aesthetics and entertainment, but also in terms of social discussions. Madame translated the every-day reality of communist Poland for Polish teenagers (CZAJKOWSKA 2012).

Theatrical explorations of human-animal relationships in *Daszeńka* and Pacan were respectively aimed at spectators that were at least four years old (LALKA 2014) and eight years old (WTL 2014b).

I will now turn to Greta Gaard's ideas about ecopedagogy. Her theory will underlie my analysis of *Daszeńka* and Pacan as examples of Krofta's innovative engagement with the social and theatrical education of young Poles.

Ecopedagogy and puppetry theatre

Greta Gaard explains that ecopedagogy grows out of children ecocriticism that interrogates links between nature and culture “through the relationships of children and animals, with particular scrutiny on the subjectivity or objectivity of the animals depicted in these narratives” (GAARD 2009: 325). Ecopedagogy mixes ecocriticism with practice that is, it not only explores the problematic “logic of domination” on the basis of which humans are allowed to abuse other animals and the environment, but also points out the possible solutions to it (GAARD 2009: 323, 328, 332). As Gaard puts it:

ecopedagogy emphasizes the need for action, commitment, change—now! It asks for

personal and socio-political changes for the health of the earth as well as its inhabitants.

It can include those types of ecocriticism that are more than mere scholarship—but they must be activist in orientation, dedicated to teaching children and their adults the strategies of sustainability, connection, and democratic community-building that considers and involves all life on earth (GAARD 2009: 333-34).

Through its focus on future, solution, and the urgency to act, ecopedagogy aims at disrupting the “logic of domination” and at reframing humans’ interactions with animals and nature in

general. The key part of the process is the exploration of animal agency (GAARD 2009: 331).

Agency is of course a very problematic term. Sarah E. McFarland and Ryan Hediger point out that even if we apply a very general idea of the agency as one's capacity to act on one's own behalf and engage in one's own interests, we will still encounter issues of a particular animal and particular circumstances, which raise a question of how much of another being, whether human or animal, we can understand (MCFARLAND and HEDIGER 2009: 8-9 and 16). On the other hand, McFarland and Hediger refer to Martha Nussbaum's idea that an animal as an agent conveys "a creature who is itself an end" (NUSSBAUM 2009: 337) rather existing for humans. In other words, the idea of animal agency opens questions about our understanding of the relationships between humans and other animals, which is how McFarland and Hediger justify their choice to use the above account of agency and explore it "in a case-by-case, unique-in-each-instance-fashion" (MCFARLAND and HEDIGER 2009: 15-16). I will follow their idea.

According to Gaard, ecopedagogy has a particular potential to explore animal agency, which in turn gives it a special position within the broader environmental movements. "The first and strongest emotional connection with nature may be children's innate love of animals", says Gaard, which allows ecopedagogy to "address children's emotions and make deep, lasting impacts because it appeals to both the emotions and the intellect" (GAARD 2009: 332). Gaard focuses on literature, perhaps because in terms of ecocriticism, children ecocriticism in particular, literary studies are more developed than theatre studies. Ecocriticism, in general, has been playing a minor part within theatre studies, which ironically links with the theatre for young audiences. However, Gaard's main points are in line with Helen Nicholson's argument that theatre, when united with education and social

justice, is “politically charged” and has unique potential to educate by focusing on the future and to offer “a vision of social change” (NICHOLSON 2009: 11-13).

According to Nicholson, the particular power of theatre grows out of political and social value of imagination expanded through theatre’s aesthetics; in theatre imaginations of artists and spectators combine to fill the gap between reality and fiction. Because of that, she explains, theatre can invite the audience “to imagine that which was previously unimagined or unimaginable”, which, in turn, challenges existing ideas and values and may evoke social change (NICHOLSON 2009: 47-51). As a result, theatre can provide young spectators with tools to critically and creatively interpret the globalised society and can present them with “imaginative insights into another world which, once seen, cannot be unseen” (NICHOLSON 2009: 58). Theatre’s role and responsibility links with another Nicholson’s point: she highlights that theatre is a particularly “memorable medium” (NICHOLSON 2009: 5). In other words the audience encounter with the live performance may last longer than the performance itself. In fact, as Karen Burland and Stephanie Pitts explain, our memories of live performances may become “entwined with our biographies” (BURLAND and PITTS 2014: 176). The point is that the re-imagined reality, encountered in the performance, may continue to affect the spectators throughout their lives.

All that suggest that ecopedagogy in theatre may be remarkably powerful. If animal agency escapes our understanding, perhaps theatre can stimulate the imagining of it; in turn our imagination combined with theatre’s memorability can affect our understanding of animal agency and reshape our relations with other animals. Puppetry theatre through its particular engagement with creating agency can offer a unique contribution to that process, as I will now explain.

Susan Bennett remarks that the interactions between the audience and the actors constitute one of the three key relations, in which the spectators are involved during the live

performance (BENNETT 1997: 151). However, as pointed out by Helena Waszkiel, an eminent Polish theatre critic, in puppetry theatre there is another participant, “an animated form” liven up through animation (WASZKIEL 2014). Paul Piris describes the puppet as “an object that appears in performance as a subject” (PIRIS 2014: 30). The puppet in performance seems to act on its own behalf, but, as Penny Francis explains, for the puppet to gain the agency it must detach itself from “any external control” (FRANCIS 2012: 139). In other words, the manipulator must “disappear”. The puppeteers transfer their presence into the puppet (FRANCIS 2012: 93). This creates a magical bond between the puppet and the puppeteer, which is “the essence of puppetry”, says Waszkiel quoted by Francis (FRANCIS 2012: 29). Piris’s arguments, however, highlight that the art of the puppeteer is not enough for the puppet to gain the agency; it is the audience that imagines the agency of the puppet (PIRIS 2014: 40). Thus, the essence of puppetry is the bond between the puppet, the puppeteer, and the audience, which unites the puppeteer’s skills with the imaginations of the puppeteer and the spectators and, in turn, creates the agency of the puppet.

I do not attempt to create links between animals and puppets. Instead, I am interested in puppetry theatre as particularly suited to facilitate the process by which agency can be imagined and sustained. I will argue that in *Daszeńka* and Pacan Krofta innovatively uses the power and the principles of a puppeteer-puppet-audience relationship to fuel the audience’s imagination, so they can explore relationships between humans and other animals as interactions between different agencies. As the essence of Krofta’s approach lies in co-presence between spectators, actors, and puppets, some theorization is needed.

Paul Piris, in his discussion on the co-presence between the puppet and the puppeteer, says that such phenomenon occurs, when “the performer creates a character through the puppet but also appears as another character whose presence next to the puppet has a dramaturgical meaning”. Co-presence requires special skills from the performers as they have

to ensure that the audience engages with both the performer and the puppet (PIRIS 2014: 31). In the situation of co-presence, the puppet gains a particular agency, which is achieved not only through skilful manipulation, but also through the interactions between the puppet and the human being (the performer). “The apparent body of the puppet” and the actual body of the performer are presented as separated and yet, through their interactions, both in presence, which creates “the epiphany of apparent consciousness in the puppet” (PIRIS 2014: 37). In other words, the co-presence between the puppet and the puppeteer additionally stimulates the audience to imagine the agency of the puppet.

The coexistence of puppets and humans is not untypical for Krofta’s style and that of the Drak Theatre. Penny Francis remarks that in the Drak Theatre’s productions “the presence of the puppets alongside the performers always had dramaturgical quality” (FRANCIS 2012: 113). In *Daszeňka*, Krofta combines his techniques and aesthetics to establish very rich and multi-layered co-presence between the actors, the puppets, and the audience. Because of that *Daszeňka* will be my main focus. In Pacan, Krofta plays with audience-actor relation and there is only one case of a co-presence between the puppets and the actors; however the moment is critical for the production’s engagement with animal-human relations. In both productions, Krofta employs creative strategies to enhance memorability of the performances. By extension, *Daszeňka* and Pacan become powerful examples of the ecopedagogical potential of puppetry theatre.

Daszeňka: respectful interactions and collective responsibilities

Karel Čapek wrote, illustrated, and photographed the story about a fox terrier puppy growing up under the title *Dášeňka čili Život štěněte* [Dashenka, or the Life of a Puppy]. The 1933 novel is narrated by a man and offers his observations of the puppy, an account of his verbal and non-verbal interaction with *Dášeňka*, and fairytales for dogs told to *Dášeňka* by the narrator. The amusing fairytales focus on the origins of dog-human relations and on the

development of dogs' behaviours, for instance fox terriers' love for digging. The novel was translated to Polish by Jadwiga Bułakowska and first published by Nasza Księgarnia in 1950 under the title *Daszeńka, czyli żywot szczeniaka* [Dashenka, or the Life of a Puppy]. In 1979 the book was turned into a television series by Květa Kuršová a Břetislav Pojar; Pojar directed it for the Czechoslovak Television ČST (ČESKÁ TELEVIZE 2014). The dog in the televised adaptation, a mixture of cartoon and film, strikingly resembled the fox terrier from Čapek's photograph.

Pojar's series was broadcasted in the early 1980s by the Polish National Television TVP as part of Dobranocka [Good Night Story]. Dobranocka was a popular evening programme for children starting at 7 pm and one of the most important pop culture phenomena of communist Poland, particularly for the Polish generation of the 1970s and 1980s (KOZICZYŃSKI 2009: 78-79). Arguably, many of the parents who accompanied their children to Krofta's staging of *Daszeńka* were in the past glued to the TV screen watching the adventures of the puppy. Thus the production potentially had an immediate appeal to those buying the tickets by inviting them on a sentimental journey, especially given that Krofta adapted the well-known Bułakowska's translation. For instance, the reviewer Agnieszka Szydłowska experienced such a sentimental journey and started her review from recalling the famous opening of Čapek's book (SZYDŁOWSKA 2011).

The performance does not start, however, from a well-known: "Gdy się urodziło to było to takie białe nic..." [When it was first born it was just a white bit of nothing...] (ČAPEK 2013: 7). Instead, within a conventional proscenium space, with drawn curtains, there is a spotlight and simple, melodic music playing in the background, composed by Paweł Łuczak. In the archival recording of the production, one can also hear the excited voices of the young spectators. The spotlight increases in intensity and male and female voices are heard saying "Good Morning". The four actors – Monika Babula, Aneta Harasimczuk, Wojciech Pałęcki,

and Piotr Tworek – come into the spotlight and welcome the audience by waving, smiling, and saying they are really happy to see them. They all are wearing exaggerated versions of contemporary clothing in various shades of blue, red, and cream (designed by Slovak scenographer Zoja Zupková and visible on the photograph from the ending of the production, Fig. 1) (WARZECHA 2011). They looked as if they dressed up to play a family.



Fig. 1: Monika Babula, Aneta Harasimczuk, Wojciech Pałęcki, and Piotr Tworek in Jakub Krofta's staging of *Daszeńka*.
Photo © Bartek Warzecha, reproduced with permission

Pałęcki asks if anyone has a dog, introducing the main theme of the performance. The question immediately evokes replies, given through raised hands and voices. The actors engage with spectators individually and encourage responses, either through eye contact and hand gestures or through questions – for example Harasimczuk asks some of the children: “What dog do you have?”. Through the interactions, the actors carefully direct the discussion towards the responsibilities attached to having a dog. They suggest that children want to play with dogs, but do not look after dogs. In other words, the dogs are treated like toys or objects.

As the conversation progresses, the children become braver in their responses. And, when Harasimczuk introduces the story that the actors are going to tell, some children immediately shout the name: “Daszeńka”. The actors explain their parts in the story and

make it clear to the children that they will be only playing their roles. Harasimczuk will be a mother; Pałęcki will play a father; Babula and Tworek will play daughter and son respectively. The actors start the story by saying that mother Iris gave the birth to Daszeńka.



Fig. 2: Piotr Tworek manipulates a woolly jumper puppet Iris, with Daszeńka tucked up in a pocket, while Aneta Harasimczuk runs away. Photograph © Bartek Warzecha, reproduced with permission.

My detailed description of the opening has a point. The start of *Daszeńka* carefully frames the audience encounter with the performance and its themes. First of all, the opening marks the objectification of animals as a problem in the young audiences' interaction with dogs, which is one of the ecopedagogical tasks (GAARD 2009: 332). Second of all, it establishes Krofta's key strategies to engage its youngest spectators: interaction and play. Both are crucial for the aesthetic experience of the young audiences and for the ecopedagogical aims of the production, as I will now discuss using Nellie McCaslin's and Jeanne Klein's analyses of aesthetics in theatre for young audiences.

Nellie McCaslin explains that participatory theatre is very appealing to youngest children as it "is similar to their own play"; participatory theatre offers its young audiences "a dual experience – as spectators and as participants" (MCCASLIN 2005: 17), which is visible in the opening of *Daszeńka*. McCaslin's arguments are also in line with Bennett's point that,

in general, the spectators “stripped” from their invisibility are empowered as they are reminded that they are the ones who ultimately decide on the meanings and success of the performance (BENNETT 1997:124, 133, 156). Of course, the levels of responsibility given to the audience may vary depending on the age of spectators. However, the key point is that interactions and play are aesthetically very appropriate for the youngest audiences; they also provide the children with the agency and certain responsibility for their action and for the shape of the performance.

The participatory and playful qualities of *Daszeňka* also fuel the audience’s imagination, which is crucial for the performance achieving its ecopedagogical aims. The youngest audiences are very sensitive to the differences between the reality presented on the stage and the “actual world”, explains Jeanne Klein (2005:48). However McCaslin remarks that “when a theatrical convention is employed openly and honestly”, as the frame of play is introduced in *Daszeňka*, young spectators understand and respect it, even if certain elements of the production are not “realistic” (MCCASLIN 2005: 17). Consequently, the spectators of *Daszeňka* can engage in the interactive play with the four actors, which is sustained throughout the performance. Following McCaslin’s points, “the imagined reality” that starts in this play has a power to captivate the audience and encourage them to go on a journey “to another place, another time, on an adventure”; what follows is “a new way of looking at things”. (MCCASLIN 2005: 15). To sum up, the opening of *Daszeňka* creates the perfect environment to facilitate change through the combined imaginations of the spectators and actors.

Krofta builds on the start of the performance to establish a unique co-presence between the puppets, all actors and, as the performance progresses, the audience. For a start, the puppets of *Daszeňka* and her mother Iris (designed by Zoja Zupková) are animated by all four actors that, at the same time, enact their own characters. Iris is performed by a large hand

puppet that looks as if it was made of a huge wool jumper. The puppet has a pocket, in which the actors sometimes place the puppet of Daszeńka, highlighting the bond between the mother and the daughter. The Iris's puppet is animated through its head and tail; its mouth is moveable and a hand of an actor manipulating it performs as Iris's tongue. Different actors perform Iris throughout the performance and it is usually one or two of them at a time. The co-presence between the actors and the puppet is particularly striking, when one actor animates Iris, while the other is creating the sounds.

For instance, Babula, narrating the story, talks about Iris looking after Daszeńka, while animating the puppet, so it looks like Iris is licking Daszeńka, placed at that stage in Iris's pocket. Babula's body seems separated from the body of Iris, as Babula's directs her speech at the audience, while her gaze moves from the audience to Iris, on which actions she comments. Iris's gaze is focused only on Daszeńka. At the same time Tworek uses his vuvuzela to make sounds of Iris's breathing and licking. Tworek's face is turned away from the audience as he looks at Iris, as if observing her actions, which makes the source of Iris's sounds less visible; the vuvuzela additionally covers Tworek's mouth. The actors simultaneously perform the action of their characters, while animating the puppet in a way that separates the source of Iris's movement from the source of her sounds and also hides both sources. Iris seems to co-exist on the stage independently from, but together with Babula and Tworek. Moreover, the joyful noises of children in reaction to Iris licking Daszeńka confirm that the puppet appears to the audience as behaving on its own behalf. Iris's agency is confirmed by two actors' and the audience interactions with her. As a result, and in accordance with Piris's earlier points (PIRIS 2014: 37), Babula, Tworek, and the young spectators establish a co-presence with the puppet. The puppet becomes the dog that children can engage with.

Iris's agency is strengthened, when all four actors enact Iris trying to protect *Daszeńka* from strangers by barking and biting, while simultaneously they also perform various characters' reactions to it. Harasimczuk and Pałęcki, with circus music in the background, enact various characters, for example a lady with a basket or an older man. Iris, manipulated by Tworek, bites, growls, and pulls the old man's walking stick and the lady's basket. Although only one actor manipulates the puppet, all the actors animate her. Harasimczuk's and Pałęcki's bodies perform the strength of Iris's pulling. Babula performs Iris's aggressiveness, by trying, as the Daughter, to calm her down. Iris's emotions, sounds, and physicality come from four different sources that are covered up by the actors' simultaneous performances as the characters and by the dynamics of the scene. In short, we are dealing here with a multi-layered and dense co-presence between the puppet and four performers, which allows a big wool jumper to become a big, loud, angry, and, most importantly, uncontrollable dog. Iris's aggressiveness is earlier explained by the "Voice of Nature", delivered by Tworek through his vuvuzela, telling Iris to protect the helpless *Daszeńka*. Iris is not an aggressive dog, but the protective mother must be approached with caution.

The appearance of the "Voice of Nature" also suggests that the animal agency is controlled by nature, which may be limiting the animal agency to an instinct; however the simplicity of its explanation seems appropriate for the very young spectators. We must also remember that *Daszeńka* does not attempt to explore the complexity of agency and nature. Instead the production works against the idea of a dog as a toy and educates the children how to interact with animals in a respectful manner. The "Voice of Nature", by contextualising Iris's behaviour, works towards the same aim.

Krofta's exploration of co-presence between multiple actors, the puppets, and the audiences is further developed in the animation of *Daszeńka*. There are at least five hand puppets that perform *Daszeńka* at different stages of the puppy's growth. In *Daszeńka*'s first

appearance Harasimczuk carries the smallest of Daszeńka puppets in her hands.

Harasimczuk, as the Mother, moves her hands slowly as if she was stroking the puppy, which covers the other movement of Harasimczuk's hand that animates the puppet's body, so it looks as if Daszeńka was breathing. The puppet's agency, similarly the Iris's agency, is created through ostensible separation of Daszeńka's breathing from Harasimczuk's gestures as the Mother and through the co-presence of Daszeńka with all four actors that react to Daszeńka's first movements. The actors also take turns in narrating the story, which are the only moments that they turn their eyes away from the puppet and towards the audience to include them in the experience and communicate the importance of the puppy. The actors' movements, both as the puppeteers and the characters, are slow, gentle, and cautious and they gather closely to the puppet. Their kinesics and proxemics towards the puppet help to represent the fragility of the newborn puppy that dependent on humans, which reinforced by the actors saying that the newborn Daszeńka "was quite blind" (ČAPEK 2013: 7).

Later on, when Daszeńka is portrayed by one of the bigger puppets, the audience sees the family asleep on the stage, while Daszeńka "walks" and "runs" on them. Pałęcki (Father) is spread across the stage. The other actors "sleep" behind him and use him as a "pillow". The body of Pałęcki functions here as a form of screen, behind which the other actors manipulate at least two identical Daszeńka's puppets. As a result, Daszeńka can appear at the different parts of Pałęcki's body at short intervals; Daszeńka seems to run freely and is also more independent from the humans. In another moment, Babula, as the Daughter, mops the floor after the puppy urinated. She holds the mop in both hands and has the Daszeńka puppet on one of them, so it looks like Daszeńka holds to the mop with her teeth. We understand that the puppy pulls the mop, when Babula moves her body as if it was being pulled.

The contrast between the initial and later appearances of Daszeńka creates the impression that Daszeńka grows in front of the audience's eyes. The effect is achieved by the

gradually increasing dynamics of the actors' animation and proxemics between the subsequent Daszeńka's puppets and the actors-as-characters, as discussed. The young audience's responses to Daszeńka also change from observations, through direct interactions, until emotional engagement; the latter is important for the ecopedagogical aims (GAARD 2009: 332). "She woke up", notices a quiet voice during the first appearance of the puppy. "Daszeńka was naughty", says one of the children in the audience, when the Father lectures the puppy. Later on, when Daszeńka pees on the floor again, several children say "Daszeńka you cannot do that". At the end, when Daszeńka, adopted by a new family, disappears, there is a lot of crying in the auditorium.

In other words, the multiple co-presences between each of Daszeńka's puppets, the actors, and the spectators seem to have a different quality. However, all the puppets represent one Daszeńka and the actors as the characters refer to each puppet as if it was the same dog, which confirms that each puppet represents the same agency. As a result, Daszeńka detaches herself not only from the bodies' of the puppeteers, but also from the apparent bodies of the puppets that represent her. As the audience's imagination operates at a high level of intensity, stimulated by the aesthetic devices of play and participatory theatre, the dog's agency can be imagined and expanded through the imagined and increasing agency of the puppets. In the mop scene, Daszeńka's agency expands to the level at which it seems that the dog is manipulating the actors and not the other way around, as noted by one of the reviews (DERKACZEW 2011). The agency of the animal dominates the agency of the human, which links *Daszeńka* with Gaard's ecopedagogical aims.

The double-imagined agency of Daszeńka helps the performance to reframe relations between the human and animals. In Krofta's production, the interactions between the Family and both dogs are underlined by respect and responsibility. For instance, when Iris and Daszeńka are asleep, just after Daszeńka was born, the actors walk slowly shushing the

audience and each other; when the Son (Tworek) makes a noise by dropping his vuvuzela the entire family looks at him with disapproval. They are quiet to respect Iris's right to rest.

Another example is the cleaning scene, when everyone helps to clean multiple puddles of urine left by the puppy. In the reality created on the stage every single household member, including Iris, plays a part in Daszeńka's upbringing. The already quoted reactions of the young spectators confirm that they also accept their responsibility for Daszeńka's behaviour ("Daszeńka you cannot do that").

The sense of collective responsibility connects with the intergenerational feeling that the performance creates through comedy, which is particularly evident in the fairytales about dogs told to Daszeńka. In those fairytales the dogs are performed by the actors, rather than puppets, creating the clear division between the "reality" and the fairytale, but also between the "real" dogs (the puppets) and the pretend dogs (the actors). For example, there is a fairytale about a dog who ate a blade of bad grass. The children may laugh at Tworek performing a dog, who, after eating grass, thinks he is a prince wearing golden heels. Donald Capps explains that the youngest children react with laughter to absurd situations, because laughter allows them to overcome their anxiety of not understanding the world (CAPPs 2006: 129). The adults are likely to understand the joke differently, since Polish "trawa" denotes both grass and cannabis. By extension, while different members of the audience may engage with the joke on different levels, the point is that they are laughing together and laughter creates community (MAY 2006: 191). And *Daszeńka*'s audiences laugh frequently, as highlighted by the reviewers (DERKACZEW 2011 and ZAWORSKA 2011).

The collective experience may be strengthened by the sentimental value of Bułakowska's translation and Zupková's puppets similarity to Daszeńka from Čapek's photographs and Pojar's series. By extension there is a potential for the older spectators to engage with the performance and perhaps be reminded how some of them wanted a dog,

when they were children, as it was the case for one of the reviewers (SZYDŁOWSKA 2011).

By creating a collective experience for children and their adult minders, the production also encourages a dialogue about the issues it raises. Such conversations would extend the audiences' encounter with the ecopedagogical themes beyond the timeframe of performance and, potentially, enhance its memorability. Consequently – in accordance with Burland's, Pitts's, and Nicholson's earlier points – the dog-human relations, as re-imagined through the performance, would have stronger impact upon the spectators in their every-day life.

Importantly, the topics for discussion suggested by *Daszeńka* do not only concern dogs. In one of the fairytales told to Daszeńka, vegetarian angels appear. They look after the first fox terrier created by God, the Fox (Babula). In Paradise, the Fox is not allowed to play and the meals consist of cheese and cream, as the Angels are vegetarian. The Fox plays with little devils outside of Paradise and, after the attempt to sneak one of them in, the Angels (in Ćapek's story it is the Creator) decide that dogs are more suited to live with humans. The fairytale plays on Adam and Eve's banishment from Eden, which may be quite engaging for the adults as well as suggest connections between humans and dogs that both belong between good and evil. Although the production does not promote a vegetarian diet or ethics, the story about the Fox associates vegetarianism with certain ethical superiority. It also introduces the idea of a vegetarian diet to the children and, arguably, provokes questions afterwards.

Krofta's *Daszeńka* does not engage with the environmental issues on a large scale. Instead it does something potentially much more important that is it mobilizes a small yet significant change in the relationship between humans and animals. Krofta builds on receptive strategies that his young spectators have already developed, on the children's love and longing for dogs, possibilities of puppetry theatre, and on the skills of his actors to mark a problem within child-animal relations and to offer immediate and long-term solutions to it for both children and adults. *Daszeńka* invites the audiences to imagine a democratic

community that includes children, adults, and animals and to create the sense of collective responsibility for human-animal relations. Multiple and multi-layered co-presences between the actors, the puppets, and the spectators facilitate the interplay between the characters, the dogs, and children through which spectators and *Daszeńka* learn. While human children and dog children are different, they all learn quickly and through interactions with others. The urgency to teach children the responsible and respectful interactions with animals is encoded in *Daszeńka*'s growth and her processes of learning. *Daszeńka* is not a call for an environmental protest, but a call for responsible interactions, repeated by Tworek through the vuvuzela at the very end. *Daszeńka* is a call for a discussion about having a dog, but also about humans and animals in general.

Pacan: emotional call for help to encourage adoption

Pacan was Krofta's first production as the newly appointed Artistic Director. The production once again features collaboration between Krofta, Maria Wojtyszko, and Zoja Zupková. Wojtyszko's play is based on her own experience of adopting a dog from a shelter, whose anxieties she was trying to understand (MATUSZEWSKA 2011). It focuses on the adventures of a dog called Pacan looking for Marcin (his human minder), who went away for a weekend, but Pacan thinks he got lost. Searching for his human, Pacan himself gets lost. Scared, hungry, attacked by an aggressive bulldog and the bulldog's owner, he finally ends up in a shelter, together with other dogs, ferrets, and an elephant. Pacan, who in the shelter falls in love with a female greyhound Princess, finds his happy ending, when Marcin visits the shelter. Although he does not recognize Pacan instantly, he finally realizes that this is his long-lost friend and takes Pacan, Princess, and their puppies, home. He also promises to find good families for the puppies after they grow up.

In *Daszeńka* the enhanced co-presences worked to give the agency to the dogs. In *Pacan* the limited co-presence, which occurs only once, operates as a means to give the

agency to the audience, so they can oppose the cruelty of humans towards animals. In working towards that effect, Krofta, as in *Daszeńka*, engages the audiences' imagination by playing with the age-appropriate aesthetics. Pacan is advertised for the audiences of eight years old and older. By that age, as explained by Jeanne Klein, children can engage with plot driven situations, characters, and their subtext's. They continue to be engaged with a "realistic" portrayal of the world with the believeable characterizations being a criterium. The live actors and believable emotions performed by them are particularly attractive to the children between ages six and twelve (KLEIN 2010: 117-119). Krofta facilitates that by using live actors for most of the characters, both humans and animals. However, through visual elements and specific casting choices, his production also works to facilitate the audience's critical engagement with the human characters and their actions and emotional engagement with the animal characters. Both types of involvement are crucial in ecopedagogical processes (GAARD 2009: 332).

All the human characters, with two exceptions, are performed by the pair of actors, Marta Kwiek and Marek Koziarczyk. Although the roles created by the actors are expressive and varied, they are all linked through the actors that perform them. As pointed by several critics, Bert O. States for instance, the audience never forgets about the actor in favour of the character (STATES 1985: 119). In addition, their costumes are very similar as Zoja Zupková dresses all human characters in black and white. The dominant colour in their costumes is white, which reflects the stage lights and "washes out" Kwiek's and Koziarczyk's faces. As a result their expressions are less visible; sometimes one cannot see them at all, as when Kwiek performs the Lady, who finds Pacan (Marek Tatko) on the street and brings him to the shelter. In this role she wears a huge hat that completely covers her face. As a result of all that, human characters look very similar, which encourages the audience to perceive them as a group rather than individuals and discourages emotional involvement. Moreover, the fact

that Kwiek and Koziarczyk perform majority of human roles also highlights their identity as the actors, which, in turn, establishes certain aesthetic distance that works towards the spectators' critical (rather than emotional) engagement with human characters and their actions.

In contrast, the presentation of animal characters works to build an emotional connection between them and the audience. For a start, animal characters feature in the story much more often than humans. They are also individualised. Each is played by a different actor (with one exception of a short episode) and has a name. They all wear colourful costumes and their faces express multiple emotions, highlighted by colourful make-up, as visible on Natalia Kabanow's production shot (2012).



Fig. 3: Pacan- *historia o miłości* [Pacan – a Story About Love], directed by Jakub Krofta. Happy Ending. Photograph © Natalia Kabanow, reproduced with permission.
At the front, standing left to right: Patrycja Łacina-Miarka (Princess), Marek Tatko (Pacan), Grzegorz Mazoń (Marcin), and the nurse Zosia (Marta Kwiek).
At the back, standing left to right: Sławomir Przepiórka (Tolek), Konrad Kujawski (Metal), Józef Frymet (The Elephant Gustaw)

Such a portrayal of characters invites the emotional engagement; especially given that they all bear the traces of suffering caused by being abandoned by humans. As a case in point, Princess (Patrycja Łacina-Miarka), abandoned because she chewed on the humans' shoes,

always scratches herself nervously. Most importantly, however, Wojtyszko's story and Krofta's staging thereof are focused on the misery of Pacan (Marek Tatko), who lost Marcin (Grzegorz Mazoń). The spectators never witness Marcin's misfortunes.

The individualised representation of animals echoes McFarland and Hediger's call to explore animal agency "in a case-by-case, unique-in-each-instance-fashion" (MCFARLAND and HEDIGER 2009: 15-16). Its contrast with the generalised portrayal of humans works in the opposite direction to the "logic of domination" that singles out one species (humans) and positions it against a general group of animals. Moreover, in Pacan humans are presented as inferior to animals. First of all, animals, through their suffering, gain the moral superiority. They are also shown as smarter: when the actors-animals speak and the actors-humans act as if they cannot understand them. However the audience can, which again connects the spectators with the animal characters. The animals in Pacan have also a longer memory and love more deeply than humans, as evident at the end, when Marcin finally comes to the shelter. Pacan recognizes him immediately, but it takes Marcin some time to see who Pacan is. In fact, Marcin does not recognize the dog until he sees his own hat, which Pacan kept all that time. Emotions, morality, memory, and other higher cognitive abilities, are associated with the superiority of human agency over the animal agency, as argued by McFarland and Hediger (MCFARLAND and HEDIGER 2009: 2-6). Therefore Krofta's spectators are invited to imagine the world, in which the rules of human superiority are turned upside down. In Pacan animals dominate.

The superiority of animals emphasises the moments during which the audience witnesses the humans harming an animal. A particularly striking example of that is Pacan's nightmare, which is also the only appearance of the puppets in the production. Hungry and lonely Pacan dreams about the people who were his family, when he was a puppy. The family

is performed here by rod puppets, designed by Zupková and visible on the photograph by Kabanow (2012).



Fig. 4: Pacan – a Story About Love (Pacan- historia o miłości), directed by Jakub Krofta. Pacan's Dream. Photograph ©Natalia Kabanow, reproduced with permission.
At the front: Marek Tatko (Pacan).
The puppeteers, standing left to right: Krzysztof Grębski, Sławomir Przepiórka, Patrycja Łacina-Miarka.

The white colour and lack of facial expressions connect the puppets with other human characters. They look like they are made of pillows to support the frame of the dream, which is important as it allows the children to read Tatko's emotional reactions to the puppets as believable. The bodies of the puppets are frozen in aggressive poses. For instance, the largest puppet (a father) has its hand raised as if ready to slap. The audience learns about them yelling at him for playing, calling him stupid, giving him the name Pacan [plunker], and finally dumping the puppy in a rubbish bin. Tatko performs Pacan's trauma by waking up from his dream with a loud scream. Fear is visible on his face. The spectators are confronted with the genuine pain of an individual animal caused by cruel humans.

Rods are attached to the back of the puppets and they are manipulated by the actors, invisible in their black hoods (missing in the photograph). Because of that, it seems like the

puppets are sailing in the air above sleeping Pacan or, perhaps more to the point, the memory of them is hanging over Pacan's head. We are not dealing with a full co-presence here as Tatko does not manipulate the puppets. However, Piris argues that it is the authentic reactions of a human actor to a puppet that facilitates co-presence (PIRIS 2014: 37). Therefore, we can talk about the dream scene as an example of a limited co-presence that still highlights the agency of the puppets, which helps to notice that the family chooses to harm Pacan. Consequently the spectators can understand that they also have a choice; especially given that, as Klein argues, the audiences of eighth years and older compare "themselves with the characters' pro- and antisocial behaviour" (KLEIN 2010: 117).

The empowerment of the audience to oppose cruelty towards animals is reinforced during the shelter scenes, when an adoption of an animal is presented as a possible solution. The animals in the shelter, separated from the audience by the actual cage, are lonely. While waiting for adoption, the dogs Tolek (Sławomir Przepiórka) and Metal (Konrad Kujawski) are pacing around their boxes. The Elephant Gustaw (Józef Frymet) sits alone in the corner and only when he hears the music, he stands up and waves his ears (created by Frymet through animation of a grey cape) as if dancing. The blind dog Babel (Krzysztof Grębski) dies near the end of the performance, because, as he says, he has finally stopped wishing for his own human. This death is represented metaphorically by Grębski hanging Babel's hat on the cage, the nurse Zosia (Kwiek) taking his bowl away, and Grębski leaving the stage accompanied by the vocalization of the other actors performing the dogs. Babel's death highlights the urgency to act and provide homes for abandoned animals, bringing the production close to Gaard's arguments about ecopedagogy (GAARD 2009: 333-334).

Babel's death could have carried particular overtones during the performances accompanied by post-performance workshops Psiaki przedszkolaki [Pre-school Doggies], organized by the charity 2plus4 (collaborating with the WTL on that project). The

organization, founded in 2009, looks after abandoned dogs, promotes the positive interactions between humans and cats and dogs, and prepares dogs for adoptions (Fundacja 2plus4 2014). During the workshops the children and adults could meet the actual dogs, learn how to communicate with them (the need for which the production highlighted), and offer a donation for dogs waiting to be adopted (WTL 2014c). By stretching the timeframe of the performance related activities, the workshops supported its memorability. The presence of the actual dogs, either physical or as a point of reference in promotional materials, also added another layer to the inevitable anthropomorphism of animals in Pacan.

However, even the audience of the performances without the workshops were offered ideas for post-performance activities. As in *Daszeńka*, Krofta refers to environmental issues that go beyond human-dog relations to involve older audiences, provide material for discussions after the performance, and to strengthen the memorability of the event. As a case in point, the only animals in the production that never lose hope are the two revolutionary Ferrets (Irina Annusewicz and Aneta Głuch-Klucznik), who plan the uprising of all animals and want to fight for freedom. Through the Ferrets, Krofta introduces the basic ideas behind various animal liberation movements. Comic qualities of the Ferrets, often achieved through their comments about other characters, engage, on different levels, both adults and children. The production also highlights the issue of the animals used for the entertainment. While Frymet as the Elephant Gustaw performs his dance, Kujawski as Metal says “We don’t know if he likes to dance or he does it out of habit”, which suggests that Gustaw was broken in by his trainers to dance. Later on, the Film Maker (Koziar) wants to use Gustaw for a commercial, but laughs, when the nurse Zosia (Kwiek) asks him whether there will be any animal welfare officer on the set. These issues appear in the production for a split moment and, because of that, seem to be directed mainly at the adults, perhaps to encourage them to think about them and to offer a starting point for a discussion with their children.

While *Daszeńka* was a call for responsible interactions, *Pacan* is a call for help.

Building on his target audience's attraction to live actors, to characters and their individual stories, and their emotional subtext, Krofta creates strong emotional links between the children and animals. At the same time, through his distanciation techniques, he activates the spectators' critical engagement with the humans' intentional and unintentional actions that to a various degree harm animals. In turn, his aesthetic strategies tune the audience in to seeing the cruelty, hearing the animals' appeal for help, and wanting to change that. Authentic emotions of actors-as-characters evoked by humans' actions (like during *Pacan*'s dream) and highlighted consequences of humans' passivity (like Babel's death), emphasize the urgency to reframe human-animal relations through integration instead of separation; an adoption is pointed out as a possible solution. Interestingly, an adoption of an animal could build on *Pacan*'s ecopedagogical aims in terms of developing further emotional connections between humans and the adopted animal and further exploration of the animal agency in the context of a specific animal. As agencies of each animal in *Pacan* are individualised and superior to the human agency, children and adults are also encouraged to challenge the ideas that underlie the "logic of domination". Post-performance activities, both offered and suggested by the performance, worked to enhance the memorability of *Pacan* and to expand its ecopedagogical influences to the world beyond the theatre.

Conclusion

Krofta's productions engage with ecopedagogy of everyday life. In both *Daszeńka* and *Pacan* the focus is on problems, solutions, and the urgency to act. Their focus on the future is evident in their engagement with young audiences and their offer of post-performance activities. Both productions use puppets to tune in to the level of their audiences' engagement with the human and animal characters and to give agency to animals and children. In turn, *Daszeńka* and *Pacan* teach children to respect the differences between humans and other

animals without the “logic of domination” that Gaard talks about (323). Both productions remember also about adult audiences. Through cultural references, humour, and nuance *Daszeńka* and Pacan facilitate the adults’ engagement, which strengthens the productions’ call for open-minded interactions and conversations as the simplest ways for changing the social reality.

The two productions build on theatrical aesthetics to activate the imaginations of the audiences, which facilitates social and political possibilities of co-presence between the puppets, the actors, and the spectators. *Daszeńka* and Pacan translate the idea of co-presence into to human-animal relations. Using his, arguably inherently “Czech”, techniques Krofta puts a stepping stone towards “a democratic community” in Poland that does not consider humans only, but respects and embraces all life, which is in accordance with Gaard’s definition of ecopedagogy (GAARD 2009: 334). Both performances show the possibilities of co-presence between the puppets, the actors, and the spectators to create and explore respectful and equal relations between diversified groups. Thus in a broader sense, they point towards the theatrical and educational potential and importance of puppetry theatre in a globalised world. Krofta’s theatre engages with one of the main concerns in creating global theatre, which according to playwright Mark Ravenhill, is “how this particular actor with this particular audience can use this word or this gesture to better capture the sense of being alive at this moment in this city in this culture” (RAVENHILL 2009).

And he continuous to do so; under Krofta the Wrocław Puppet Theatre is not afraid of engaging its audiences of various ages in difficult discussions. *Z docieków nad życiem plciowem* [Inquires About Sex Life] directed by Paweł Aigner for adult audiences in 2013 was about sex and language. Later on that year Jarosław Kilian directed *Co krokodyl jada na obiad?* [What Does a Crocodile Eat For His Dinner?]. The production, aimed at the audiences five years old and older, explored the relationships between human and animals.

Another 2013 production was the eco-feminist Skarpety i Papiloty [Socks and Curl-papers] by Julia Holewińska, one of the most renowned twenty-first century Polish playwrights, who was commissioned by the WTL to write it. Tomasz Man directed this play for four years old and older about a family of foxes, whose mother decides to go back to work. In 2014, Jakub Krofta directed *Sam, czyli przygotowanie do życia w rodzinie* [Sam, or Preparation For Family Life] written by Maria Wojtyszko. The production, advertised as for thirteen years old and older, explored, amongst other issues, divorce, religion, and various aspects of parenthood (including abortion and in-vitro fertilisation) (PIEKARSKA 2014). Sam has received a prestigious award for the best production in the 20th National Competition for Staging Contemporary Polish Plays; the jury chose Sam over productions of theatres like Helena Modjeska's National Old Theatre from Cracow (INSTYTUT TEATRALNY 2014c).

Krofta's work is supported by the skills of the actors-puppeteers, who can coexist between various roles and accept the part they play within the larger aim of the production with humility. Together they combine their skills and imagination to explore the possibilities of puppetry and challenge their audience with difficult topics. This is what theatre is all about! Long may that last.

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