













Category: Arts and Humanities

REVIEW

## The mediametaphor of contemporary Ukrainian theatre (based on specialised printed publications of the period of Independence)

### La mediometáfora del teatro ucraniano contemporáneo (a partir de publicaciones impresas especializadas del periodo de la Independencia)

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#### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** theatre, as an art form, is intricately intertwined with the contemporary media landscape, playing a crucial role in shaping cultural and social values, and influencing the perception and interpretation of significant societal events.

**Objectives:** the relevance of this study is determined by the need to explore the mediametaphor of theatre as an instrument defining images, ideas, and concepts transmitted through the media space. The aim of the research is to uncover the significance of mediametaphor in Ukrainian theatre based on periodicals created during the Independence era: "Kino-Teatr", "Ukrainskyi Teatr", "Proscenium", "Teatralna Besida" and "Teatr Plus".

**Method:** the article is grounded in theoretical methods such as analytical, content analysis, comparative, and generalisation methods.

**Results:** the research results indicate that the media space allows theatre arts to connect with the audience through various formats, including video transmissions, interactive online performances, and social media. These formats are characteristic of media communication in theatrical centers in all major cities of the country: in Kyiv, Lviv, Kharkiv, and Dnipro. This expands the possibilities of communication and interaction for the audience with the theatrical process, shaping their understanding and perception of art. In this context, the mediametaphor of theatre becomes an instrument defining images, ideas, and concepts conveyed to the audience through the media space.

**Conclusions:** the article makes a significant contribution to the scientific literature on theatre journalism and cultural studies, broadening the understanding of these concepts in the modern Ukrainian context.

**Keywords:** Art; Cultural Characteristics; Journalism; Periodicals; Social Media.

#### RESUMEN

**Introducción:** el teatro, como forma artística, está íntimamente entrelazado con el panorama mediático contemporáneo, desempeñando un papel crucial en la formación de valores culturales y sociales, e influyendo en la percepción e interpretación de acontecimientos sociales significativos.

**Objetivos:** la relevancia de este estudio viene determinada por la necesidad de explorar la mediometáfora

del teatro como instrumento que define imágenes, ideas y conceptos transmitidos a través del espacio mediático. El objetivo de la investigación es descubrir el significado de la medimetáfora en el teatro ucraniano a partir de las publicaciones periódicas creadas durante la época de la Independencia: «Kino-Teatr», «Ukrainskyi Teatr», «Proscenium», «Teatralna Besida» y «Teatr Plus».

**Método:** el artículo se basa en métodos teóricos como el analítico, el análisis de contenido, el comparativo y el de generalización.

**Resultados:** los resultados de la investigación indican que el espacio mediático permite a las artes escénicas conectar con el público a través de diversos formatos, como las transmisiones de vídeo, las representaciones interactivas en línea y las redes sociales. Estos formatos son característicos de la comunicación mediática en los centros teatrales de las principales ciudades del país: en Kyiv, Lviv, Kharkiv y Dnipro. Esto amplía las posibilidades de comunicación e interacción del público con el proceso teatral, lo que determina su comprensión y percepción del arte. En este contexto, la medimetáfora del teatro se convierte en un instrumento que define imágenes, ideas y conceptos transmitidos al público a través del espacio mediático.

**Conclusiones:** el artículo hace una contribución significativa a la literatura científica sobre periodismo teatral y estudios culturales, ampliando la comprensión de estos conceptos en el contexto ucraniano moderno.

**Palabras clave:** Arte; Características Culturales; Periodismo; Publicación Periódica; Medios de Comunicación Sociales.

## INTRODUCTION

The impact of media perception on all aspects of life is critical for understanding cultural events under the postmodern paradigm. Theatrical journalism, an important aspect of theatrical journalism, is a separate semantic idea of artistic reality, combining artistic and mass communication literature to provide unique interpretations of the world's depiction in dramatic form. Within the amalgamation of artistic realities, contemporary theatrical journalism articulates and highlights theatre's fundamental categories as significant media events, with mediametaphor serving as the foundational concept - a conceptual tool that uses metaphorical language to describe or comprehend media phenomena.

Researchers interpret this relatively new concept differently. According to V. Galatska, mediametaphor serves as a means of transferring meanings and images from one sphere or concept to another to better express or explain a certain phenomenon or idea in the media space.<sup>(1)</sup> Thus, mediametaphor can be used to analyse or explain how certain ideas, concepts, or events in the media environment are compared with other areas of knowledge or reality through the use of figurative language.

In the view of V.O. Fialko, in contemporary theatrical journalism, mediametaphor indicates the use of metaphorical means in speech and expression for the analysis, description, or interpretation of theatrical phenomena through the lens of media concepts.<sup>(2)</sup> This involves the use of language, images, and ideas originating from the media space for literary or critical descriptions of theatrical events. For example, theatrical reviews or analytical materials may use metaphors arising from media terms or concepts to better convey the impression of a performance, reveal its contemporary context, or highlight media influences on the theatrical process.

In the socio-cultural context of modern Ukraine, mediametaphor is used to reflect life on stage in media publications through spiritual-cultural and sensory-spatial perception of the world. According to the research of I.Ye. Frolova and O.V. Ometsynska, this form of artistic realisation is analytically embodied in the dramatic concept of reality, manifested in various genres such as reviews, problem articles, essays, and thematic interviews.<sup>(3)</sup> Additionally, the researchers apply the concept of artistic discourse, asserting that understanding its characteristics and the interaction between the author and the reader in the context of specific historical and socio-cultural environments can be helpful in studying mediametaphor in culture and contemporary theatrical space.

The powerful role of mediametaphor in defining not only external images but also internal ideas and concepts transmitted through various media platforms is explored in the work of O. Bilyk.<sup>(4)</sup> According to the author, this process of translation in the contemporary stage involves the use of video installations to create a visual environment and the application of digital technologies for interactivity and engagement. Articles in thematic journals such as "Kino-Teatr" and "Ukrainskyi Teatr" are dedicated to these technological innovations. According to the researcher's work, these publications not only investigate technological aspects but also explore the socio-cultural consequences of using virtual platforms and interactive forms of interaction between the theatre and the audience.

The analysis of the state of contemporary theatre criticism in the journals "Proscenium", "Teatralna Besida" and "Teatr Plus" is the subject of the research by M. Garbuzyuk.<sup>(5)</sup> The author argues that the absence of systematic state cultural policies for many years has led to the degradation of both theatre as an art form

and its analytical reflection in critics' works. Modern Ukrainian society shows limited interest in the theatrical sphere, resulting in the unpopularity of criticism. There is a limited number of theatrical and radio broadcasts on both central and regional channels compared to the practices of global theatre professionals. In this context, the mediametaphor of theatre can play a crucial role, helping theatrical criticism to generate and reproduce images, ideas, and concepts through various media platforms.

According to the research by O. Klekovkin, in contemporary theatrical texts, authors propose the idea of an interactive understanding of metaphor as a tool for expanding meaning, leading to "semantic understanding" with the audience through the use of the long-term code of "conventionality".<sup>(6)</sup> Metaphorical concepts such as "theatre" and "stage performance" are noted to form complex associative connections. New semantic layers added to these basic concepts generate semantic shifts that act as intermediaries between the sacred meaning of the performance and the peculiarities of its perception by the audience. In this context, the metaphor-symbol proves to be the most adequate means of reproducing the "morphology" of theatrical art. In the media, this approach may manifest in the emphasis on using metaphors and symbols in reviews, analyses, and articles about theatre, aiming to activate audience interaction with the performance and deepen the understanding of the meaningful content of theatrical events.

Considering this, the goal of this study can be formulated as an explanation of the role of mediametaphor in Ukrainian theatre in the largest regional centers of Ukraine, using periodicals created during the Independence period: "Kino-Teatr", "Ukrainskyi Teatr", "Proscenium", "Teatralna Besida" and "Teatr Plus".

## **METHOD**

### *Eligibility criteria*

The article selection process followed specific eligibility criteria:

- Publications from Ukrainian media classified as journals within the performing arts/theatre category
- Publications focused specifically on contemporary Ukrainian theatre
- Publications in the Ukrainian language
- Publications from the time period marking Ukraine's independence (post 1991).

### *Information sources and search strategy*

The initial search was conducted using academic databases (Web of Science, Scopus), library catalogues, and online indexes to identify relevant theatrical/arts periodicals published in Ukraine during the period of interest. Additionally, a supplementary manual search was performed on the websites and digital archives of major Ukrainian theatre publications. The following keywords and their variations were used: "Ukrainian theatre", "theatrical journalism", "mediametaphor", "multimedia performance", "virtual theatre", "interactive theatre". The final selection included articles from the following major Ukrainian theatrical publications: "Kino-Teatr", "Ukrainskyi Teatr", "Proscenium", "Teatralna Besida" and "Teatr Plus".

### *Data extraction and analysis*

The data synthesis process comprised several steps, beginning with the identification of relevant publications that met the specified inclusion criteria. These included contemporary Ukrainian performing arts journals and publications focused specifically on contemporary Ukrainian theatre. Subsequently, the identified publications were meticulously analysed to extract pertinent information. Finally, the data extracted from the analysed publications were synthesised and compiled, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter at hand.

In the data compilation and synthesis process, the methodology encompassed three key steps. Firstly, relevant data sources meeting the specified inclusion criteria were identified. Secondly, these sources underwent rigorous analysis and evaluation to extract valuable insights. Thirdly, the data from the analysed sources was synthesised and compiled, culminating in a comprehensive overview of the subject matter. The data was synthesised and compiled in line with the outlined inclusion criteria, allowing for a comprehensive assessment of the research topic.

The combined methodology, based on the application of theoretical research methods (analytical, content analysis, comparative analysis, and methods of generalisation), enabled the comprehensive assessment of the research material. In summary, the application of these methods led to objective conclusions about the role of mediametaphor usage in contemporary Ukrainian journalism in Kyiv, Lviv, Dnipro, and Kharkiv. It also established a clear and logical structure for further analysis and discussion of the research results.

## **RESULTS**

Contemporary theatre transcends traditional boundaries, incorporating various art forms such as literature, acting, painting, music, and science. Innovations like computer technologies and multimedia further enrich

productions, forming complex multimedia theatrical art. The integration of technical elements began in the early 20th century, gaining momentum in the 60s-70s and flourishing within postmodern aesthetics in the 80s-90s. Today, multimedia performances continue to evolve, influenced by cultural trends and technological advancements.

Theatre, by its nature, is a synthetic form of art, making the integration of multimedia technologies a natural and organic process.<sup>(7,8)</sup> Contemporary theatre integrates diverse audiovisual art forms and cutting-edge technologies like 3D and interactive installations. These multimedia performances offer dynamic interactivity and immersive experiences for audiences, blending classical principles with innovative multimedia elements. The use of multimedia serves as a versatile tool for realising directors' visions rather than an end goal, significantly influencing how theatre is portrayed in printed publications. The most indicative in this regard are magazines such as "Kino-Teatr", "Ukrainskyi Teatr", "Proscenium", "Teatralna Besida" and "Teatr Plus".

"Ukrainskyi Teatr" is a nationwide illustrated magazine with almost a century of history, published in Kyiv. The magazine discusses the history, philosophy, and practice of Ukrainian and worldwide theatre, such as playwriting, directing, acting, and theatre studies. Throughout its history, it has tracked the growth of Ukrainian theatre, progressing from a bulletin to a critical magazine and, finally, to a widely read publication outside interval. It has recently focused on how theatre interacts with current technology, including multimedia components such as virtual reality (VR). Articles discuss VR's ability to increase audience involvement by allowing interaction with performances, actors, and virtual items, as well as the creation of surreal or fantasy scenery.

A vivid example of incorporating VR into theatre is the ballet show "Mr. and Mrs. Dream", directed by the prima ballerina of the Paris Opera, Marie-Claude Pietragalla. In this show, thousands of characters are virtual, existing within a three-dimensional virtual reality. Imagery from the imaginary world is projected onto four screens: the back wall, two side walls, and the floor, creating the illusion of infinite space with a complete three-dimensional perspective. The screens can move relative to each other, allowing actors to step behind them, give space to their virtual counterparts, and exit inconspicuously. This blurs the line between real actors and virtual images for the audience.

The Lviv magazine "Teatralna Besida" stands out with a particular emphasis on comparative analysis and review of new theatrical works, where their technical component is a key aspect. Certain articles in this publication examine how multimedia technologies affect artistic expression and interaction with the audience. Within this theme, journalists raise questions about whether the use of technology can lead to the "death" of live theatre or if it is a natural and expected evolution of this art form. Despite the fact that theatre can exist without the use of technical images, it has always shown interest in utilizing modern technological possibilities.

The use of cinematic projection on stage has its roots since the advent of cinema. Prominent directors such as Erwin Piscator, Bertolt Brecht, Les Kurbas, incorporated the cinematic screen to create additional contextual meaning and deepen the psychological characteristics of characters. In the second half of the 20th century, theatrical directors also showed interest in the advantages of video technologies. Different filming techniques, including displaying close-ups of actors or unexpected perspectives on video screens for the audience, were employed.<sup>(9,10)</sup>

In the work of Frank Castorf, video is seen as a form of reality show, recognised for its rebellious approach and provocative contribution to German theatre. Using video screens, he often transforms classical art pieces into real reality shows. The operator, who follows the characters in real-time, even beyond the stage - in corridors, service rooms, becomes an integral part of his production. One striking example of this approach is Heiner Goebbels' performance "Eratijaratijaka". After fifteen minutes of the show, the actor puts on outerwear and leaves the stage. The operator leaves the first row and follows him. All subsequent actions are reflected on the screen in video projection. The audience sees how the actor walks down the street, takes a microbus, gets out, approaches a building, enters a code, goes into the entrance, goes up to the apartment, checks the mail, and prepares dinner. The theatrical desire to go beyond the stage materialises in the work of Ukrainian director Andriy Zholdak, who gained experience in Frank Castorf's theatre. However, Zholdak's use of a camera following the actor from the stage to the street does not operate in real-time. In fact, the audience observes previously recorded events. Thus, the recorded material in the form of reality cinema becomes an organic extension of the theatrical action.

The journal "Proscenium" focuses its investigations on the multimedia approach and its criticism. It notes that the multimedia approach has become one of the main creative and technological methods in the creation of modern theatrical productions. It is evident that contemporary directors use technology in various aspects, and their creative pursuits enable the realization of high artistic goals through modern means of expression. Mobility, visual expressiveness, brightness, innovation, and active interaction with the audience during events become the main directions of directors' creative searches.<sup>(1,11)</sup>

Immersive theatre engages audiences as active participants rather than passive observers, often incorporating interactive elements for audience-actor and audience-environment interaction. In line with contemporary

inclusivity trends, audio description is gaining traction as a method to enhance accessibility for people with visual impairments.<sup>(12,13)</sup> This involves real-time or recorded commentary describing visual elements like actor actions and set design, enabling better understanding and enjoyment of theatrical or cinematic experiences for individuals with visual impairments.

Critics generally positively evaluate immersive theatre and audio description as manifestations of innovation in the field of arts and culture. Among the positive aspects of these phenomena, the following can be mentioned:

1. Immersive Theatre (interaction and engagement with the audience - providing viewers with the opportunity to actively interact with the performance, becoming part of the action and gaining a unique experience; creativity and innovation - expanding the boundaries of traditional theatrical art and introducing innovative approaches to the performance).
2. Audio Description (accessibility for individuals with visual impairments - making theatrical performances more accessible to people with visual impairments, allowing them to effectively perceive visual content; inclusivity and equal opportunities - all viewers can participate in cultural events on equal terms).<sup>(14,15)</sup>

The interpenetration of media and theatre is positively assessed on the pages of the analytical and simultaneously popular art journal “Kino-Theatre”. Consequently, in the modern period, there is not only the aestheticization of theatrical techniques but also the technologisation of the artistic decoration of the theatrical stage, a result of the mutual influence of science and art. The concepts of “virtual” and “interactive theatre”, formed under the influence of digital culture, significantly enriched the conventional understanding of theatre. In this context, the integration of new technologies into theatre is associated with changes in scenographic imagery, the development of socio-aesthetic features of the collision of eras, and the enrichment of the technical equipment of the theatre, including the use of video technologies, which creates conditions for new genre-specific theatrical solutions (figure 1).



Figure 1. Use of video technologies in the performance

Digital technologies in contemporary scenography expand stage space and create new cultural contexts through spatial composition, special effects, and hyperrealism. Digital modelling and multimedia programmes merge into the director-designer’s multifaceted activity, while online broadcasts on the Internet contribute to the globalisation of theatrical perception. Opinions among art historians and critics are divided regarding online broadcasts. While they can expand the audience and facilitate global cultural exchange, some argue that they cannot convey the full live performance experience and may impact theatres’ financial status if accessed for free.

The information-analytical cultural journal “Teatr Plus” (Dnipro) addresses the question of the relationship

between the scenographer, artist, and director in creating a stage performance. Modern theatre studies recognise that the role of the scenographer is not only as a secondary phenomenon but also as an essential aspect of contemporary theatre. Stage artists can now be full-fledged co-authors of a performance, directing their work to create visual effects using special stage mechanisms. This reflects the influence of postmodern aesthetics on theatrical art. Contemporary artistic culture, which takes into account the principles of postmodernism, is characterised by eclecticism, parody, imitation, citation, and innovative openness. This approach seeks to perceive the world as a text, a play of signs and meanings, constructing it not on reflection but on modelling reality. In modern theatre, the organization of space becomes crucial, and stage artists use various postmodern techniques, such as video installations and different lighting designs for performances, to reflect ideas about the danger of losing the human image in civilisation's wings. Many stage artists are actively engaged in independent projects, such as installations, painting, and graphics, where they can express their individual themes and ideas without the external pressure of a director. This allows them to focus on their creative expression and separate themselves from the traditional theatrical environment. Additionally, as critics note, a new type of creative relationship between the artist and the machine is forming in our time, allowing them to perceive the world in virtual space. This symbiosis of art and modern technologies is essential for finding optimal creative solutions, modelling scenography and the directorial process to meet the needs of the contemporary audience. The comparison of the analysed journals in terms of the degree of involvement of media metaphors in research can be seen in table 1.

**Table 1.** Comparison of Ukrainian journals by the degree of involvement of media metaphor in research

Comparison aspect	Publication venue	Focus and theme of articles	Involvement of mediametaphor, aspects of its research
Ukrainskyi Teatr	Kyiv	National theatre	Actively explores the interaction of theatrical art with modern technological reality, including the use of VR.
Teatralna Besida	Lviv	Comparative analysis and review of theatrical performances	Examines how multimedia technologies impact artistic expression and interaction with the audience.
Proscenium	Kyiv	Theatrical criticism	Focuses on the multimedia approach and its critique.
Kino-Teatr	Kyiv	Interaction of media and theatre	Defines the multimedia approach as one of the main creative and technological methods in creating performances.
Teatr Plus	Dnipro	Scenography, the role of the scenographer in creating performances	Various postmodernist techniques are used, such as video installations and lighting design, to create visual effects.

The above reveals that modern technologies and the “virtualisation” of the theatre lead to the blurring of boundaries between theatres in different regions. The discussed journals consistently explore how technologies and virtual platforms help theatres in various regions come together, collaborate, and provide audiences with new artistic experiences.

## DISCUSSION

Contemporary theatre's mediametaphor is a pertinent research area in the global academic landscape. Traditionally, mass media served as channels for disseminating socially significant information. Many publications and courses focused on theatre and mass media typically explore theatre's adaptation of canonical plays for film and television, examining its media-specific aspects. However, D. Khaustova views performative theatre as a means of communication.<sup>(16)</sup> The modern conception of theatre as mixed media, a place where various other media converge in acts of mimesis, is a relatively recent development. It is emphasised that what works on stage does not necessarily work or works differently elsewhere. Therefore, as television and cinema became more effective media for presenting realism, theatre practices turned their attention to the symbolic and metaphorical realm that does not become outdated. In this regard, it is indisputable that, being an older medium than cinema, theatre does not lose relevance due to its adaptability and constant reevaluation of itself and its mission.

There is another aspect concerning the relationship between theatre and mass media. Researcher J. Hoydis makes an important conclusion in his work, stating that in different cultures, the critical analysis of plays and performances, as well as theatre journalism, can play different roles in the theatrical process.<sup>(17)</sup> Indeed, in many countries, including Ukraine, theatre critics have not only been respected playwrights, directors, managers, and actors for many years but have also had a significant influence on public perception of theatrical productions.<sup>(18, 19)</sup> The rise of electronic media diminishes the relevance of printed theatre journals, with audiences favouring instant online impressions over traditional critical essays. Economic pressures on theatres

prioritise filling seats over academic criticism, leading to its decline. Factors contributing to this shift include the popularity of social platforms for accessing production information, changing consumer preferences, and economic viability concerns. One of the advantages of social media is their speed and efficiency in promoting events. Thus, theatres, seeking ways to attract audiences, may prefer an active presence on social networks over supporting traditional print journals.

Continuing this discussion, D.M. Sáez suggests that in this context, it is necessary to further explore mass media, which are rapidly and continuously growing, especially social networks.<sup>(20)</sup> The list of major active social networks includes hundreds of sites, with the most popular (visited) being Facebook and Instagram, each with an audience ranging from 280 to 300 million people. Theatres must keep up with modern trends and maintain pages on at least one of these networks. According to the author of this research, the practicality remains an open question that requires detailed discussion and analysis, especially considering the specificities of each theatre, its audience, and the purpose of using social networks.

N. Santer et al. focus their research on the presentation of the autobiographical “self” by contemporary young people in various social media as an authentic brand.<sup>(21)</sup> The development of the “self” in the context of self-presentations on social media and the use of metaphors for constructing a personal narrative are linked to contemporary theatre through the concept of “theatricalisation of life”. Modern theatre, using media metaphors, also creates stage images and interactive spaces for communication with the audience. Both areas, theatre and autobiographical expression on social media, use metaphors and images to create meaningful constructions that influence audience perception and identity construction.

V. Kannen and A. Langille explore how online identities and cultures integrate into the digital practices of our lives.<sup>(22)</sup> They analyse how communities are formed and how virtual theatre unfolds, where each participant plays their role. This research reveals how people imagine traditional media in the digital world. By examining virtual theatre in the digital space, the researchers describe the use of metaphors and images that reflect the characteristics of the modern theatrical experience and contribute to a deeper understanding of how these metaphors influence perception and communication in the digital environment. This article highlights how participants in virtual theatre play their roles through metaphorical thinking. In this research, the origin of the concept of media metaphors in theatre and its transformation into “virtual theatre” is not sufficiently disclosed.<sup>(23, 24)</sup>

In contrast, I. Šeškauskiene and J. Ostanina-Olszewska conduct an analysis of linguistic means and explain how the choice of symbols and metaphorical expressions affects the perception and interpretation of events in society, corresponding to the research theme of media metaphors in contemporary theatre.<sup>(25)</sup> According to them, times of social crises, saturated with negative emotions, generate cascades of new verbal and visual symbols used by sides in the war for consciousness. In the context of discussing this aspect, this work examines neologisms created during the Maidan and Anti-Maidan as sides in the struggle for the sovereignty and democracy of Ukraine based on European values.<sup>(26-28)</sup> The meanings of these neologisms are often illustrated with visual memes. Modern theatre also uses symbols, metaphors, and other linguistic means to create an impression and impact the audience. In this case, neologisms and visual memes are presented as an analogy to theatrical elements used to influence the audience through verbal means.

## CONCLUSIONS

The study established that the 21st century has ushered in a period of innovation in the theatrical arts, characterised by dismantling stereotypical notions, experimenting with performance content, technological transformation, and integration with media. The fundamental concept underlying these transformations is the mediametaphor of modern Ukrainian theatre.

The analysis of major professional publications like “Kino-Teatr”, “Ukrainskyi Teatr”, “Proscenium”, “Teatralna Besida” and “Teatr Plus” in Kyiv, Lviv, Dnipro, and Kharkiv revealed that multimedia expands possibilities for representing the theatrical scene in print and electronic formats. Common characteristics include dismantling stereotypes, experimenting with content, technological transformation through virtual/augmented reality, enhancing artistic expression, and multimedia integration for comprehensive representation.

These trends indicate that technologies play a key role in the creative process, audience interaction, and visualising theatrical ideas through multimedia. However, some critics express concerns about the potential loss of “live” actor-audience interaction in virtualized conditions.

Overall, the development of mediametaphor in contemporary Ukrainian theatre necessitates a broad dialogue between art, technology, and the audience to address creative achievements as well as ethical and cultural challenges posed by technological progress.

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### **AUTHORSHIP CONTRIBUTION**

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