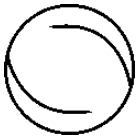

Article

Organization Studies
2017, Vol. 38(6) 775–793

DOI: 10.1177/0170840616685356
www.egosnet.org/os

Money is the Root of All Evil – Or Is It? Recreating Culture through Everyday Neutralizing Practices

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Abstract
Alternative organizations exist within the prevalent social order which they simultaneously attempt to resist. To construct and maintain alternative cultural practices, they must continuously deal with symbolic threats. By illuminating processes of cultural creation stemming from the day-to-day neutralization of threats associated with money, this ethnographic study of an intentional community moves the question of boundaries beyond issues of exclusion/inclusion. Instead, it argues for a full appreciation of the role of transgression and disorder in the shaping of organizational cultures. Two sets of everyday neutralizing practices – distancing and re-appropriating – have been identified as factors that facilitate the emergence of a relational and politicized culture of exchange.

Keywords
alternative organizations, community, culture, ethnography, symbolic boundaries

Introduction

The lived experience of organizing is messy, unstable and not as clean as sometimes depicted in organization studies (Pullen & Rhodes, 2008; Thanem, 2006). Defining organizations as 'boundary-maintaining systems' (Aldrich, 1968) requiring everyday acts of cleaning and ordering (Thanem, 2006), might lead to neglecting 'the raw pulsating and messy moral heart of the organization' (Clegg & Van Iterson, 2009, p. 287). Yet, any act of ordering implies a reciprocal impulse for disorder, suggesting that an organization's system of beliefs is a project in becoming rather than a fully realized structure (Pullen & Rhodes, 2008). Hence, instead of reducing the issues of symbolic boundaries to processes of exclusion/inclusion, we need to explore their unstable and porous nature, in order to better comprehend how an idioculture is shaped and negotiated in day-to-day interactions.

Such a perspective is particularly well-suited for studying the cultural dynamics of alternative organizations. Alternative organizations originate from a critique of the dominant social order

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(Parker, Cheney, Fournier, & Land, 2014b). That is, they resist and reject the socially constructed assumptions shared within the prevailing system of beliefs. This article focuses on one type of alternative: anti-capitalist organizations. These organizations subvert the system they are embedded in, by trying out practices stemming from the principles of autonomy, solidarity and responsibility (Parker, Cheney, Fournier, & Land, 2014a). They exist accordingly in liminal spaces, in which the issue of boundaries is preponderant (Meira, 2014). By trying to cope with their embeddedness in the neoliberal system while resisting it, alternative organizations typically face certain challenges, such as reconciling their values with their dependency upon the larger financial system (Cheney, Cruz, Peredo, & Nazareno, 2014), or balancing competitive and cooperative values (Cheney, 2002; Flecha & Ngai, 2014; Pitzer, 2014). Dependency upon the prevailing economic system constantly weakens attempts at creating and maintaining alternative organizations (Parker et al., 2014b; Rothschild & Whitt, 1989). Money is particularly problematic in that regard. Following Tönnies (1988), whilst the ideal of community (or *Gemeinschaft*) is based on mutual enjoyment, objects acquired with money are enjoyed at the exclusion of all others. Consequently, money becomes desired for its own sake and acts as a de-socializing force, driving individualization, anonymity in exchange relations, and inequality, as asserted by Gibson-Graham (2006).

The sources, uses, and meanings associated with money are likely to confuse or contradict alternative organizations' values and idealized social order, thus constituting symbolic threats to such organizations. To Mary Douglas (2004), elements are dangerous when they transgress and disturb the culturally-defined rules of purity. Transgressing boundaries creates confusion and threatens the social order (Gabriel, 2012). If money is deemed 'dirty' by groups struggling to construct organizational forms based on cooperation and community, a complete separation seems nonetheless hardly possible; as Parker and colleagues (2014b) suggest, these groups cannot operate in a vacuum. Thus, the construction of a sustainable alternative requires creating new exchange practices and re-considering meanings associated with money. It necessitates the development of an alternative culture of exchanges by which participants re-appropriate the economy (Gibson-Graham, 2006). As has been observed in different settings, small groups shape and negotiate cultural norms and bases for judgment regarding proper exchange behaviors through daily interactions (Anteby, 2010). Hence, social order is amenable to observation through the study of actors' interactions within small groups (Fine, 2003). Similar processes of rejecting dominant cultural norms have been explored in studies of anti-social behaviors. As argued by Merton in his study of deviance (1938), when individuals reject both cultural goals and institutional means valued in the larger social structure, they are inclined to replace them with alternative cultural norms. Exploring the sources of juvenile delinquency, Sykes and Matza (1957) demonstrated that oppositional cultural practices emerge out of neutralization techniques. Neutralization involves justifying deviant behaviors by nullifying the threats emanating from demands for conformity. Doing so, delinquents create new cultural toolkits to which they can refer when social requirements threaten their self-image. But how do these new cultural practices emerge out of threats to the idealized social order within alternative organizations?

Most research devoted to the study of 'dirty' objects focuses on negative responses to threats. These studies highlight different mechanisms of avoidance, such as ignorance (Douglas, 2004), distancing (Jonveaux, 2011), and cleansing (Duschinsky, 2011; Thanem, 2006). However, it is also argued that 'dirty' objects possess a creative potential in their ability to transgress and contradict prevailing classifications (Douglas, 2004; Durkheim, 2012; Kurakin, 2013). In this literature mainly devoted to the study of religious phenomena, the release of this potential has been traditionally confined to highly controlled rituals in which only a specific category of participants – such as priests (Douglas, 2004; Durkheim, 2012) – are able to handle transgressors. Yet, within alternative organizations, we still know little about how 'dirty' objects are dealt with.

This ethnographic study explores how members of Longo Maï, an intentional community, struggle with money as one of their most heightened and ideologically problematic points of dependence on the outside world they seek to resist. More precisely, it focuses on the practices developed by this group in creating and maintaining an alternative culture of exchanges through everyday neutralizing acts. It is argued that Longo Maï's idioculture is constantly re-created from everyday responses to the threats associated with money; a symbol of the larger structure's cultural goals and valued means for status-recognition. Two complementary categories of neutralizing practices have been identified in the field: *distancing* and *re-appropriating*.

The contribution of this study is twofold. First, it illuminates daily cultural processes deployed within alternative organizations to deal with the tensions emanating from their embeddedness in the larger system. It shows that alternative organizations can survive and construct a distinctive idioculture by balancing between *distancing* and *re-appropriating* practices in the face of symbolic threats. Second, this article complements Mary Douglas's theory of pollution by analyzing creative responses to ambiguity. The study shows that actors can at times directly confront impure objects, thereby creating alternative cultural practices through which the nature of the established order is re-negotiated. As such, the study responds to recent calls for emphasis on the creative potential of disorder (Pullen & Rhodes, 2008; Thanem, 2006), and for empirically digging into the ambiguity of the sacred (Kurakin, 2013). More generally, it offers a different perspective on the study of symbolic boundaries, moving beyond processes of exclusion/inclusion to appreciate the role of transgressions in the shaping of idiocultures.

The article is organized as follows: first, the theoretical foundations and basis of the argument of this study are presented. Second, the ethnographic methods and data are explained. The following part is devoted to the findings: *distancing* and *re-appropriating* practices of neutralization are analyzed. Finally, a theoretical discussion is presented.

Theoretical Background

Money as a 'dirty' object in alternative organizations

As alternative organizations attempt to resist the dominant system of beliefs, they often need to create their own, based on 'deviant' values and cultural practices. According to various sociologists, this supposes the shaping of a classification of things, requiring ordering and separation (e.g. Douglas, 1987, 2004; Durkheim, 2012). Following this line of thought, any idea or object which is likely to confuse or contradict this new classification will be deemed inappropriate – or 'dirty' – and will be rejected (Douglas, 2004; Grint, 2010). In some instances, objects are qualified as 'dirty' because they are infused with inappropriate meanings. As this concept emerged from religious studies (Durkheim, 2012), let's take an example from this domain. In the biblical narrative, Moses' mission was to lead the Israelites in worshiping a single and omnipotent god. However, during Moses' absence, they built and offered sacrifices to a golden calf that symbolized the many different gods they had traditionally worshiped. Upon his return, Moses needed to denounce and destroy the golden calf, because it *represented* an unsuitable system of beliefs, capable of contradicting the group's shared meanings. What is inferred here is that objects symbolizing what is resisted constitute entry points for transgressing and polluting the whole system. Applied to alternative organizations, any element associated with – or symbolizing – the prevailing neoliberal system might put them at risk. For example, some scholars have shown that reproducing neoliberal organizational arrangements within alternative organizations could lead to a dilution of values and to degeneration (Flecha & Ngai, 2014; Paranque & Willmott, 2014).

In classic sociology, authors have extensively documented the dangerous consequences of transgression (Douglas, 2004; Durkheim, 2012; Duschinsky, 2011). In organization studies these ideas have been used to analyze cases of organizational cannibalism (Rehn & Borgerson, 2005) and miasma (Gabriel, 2012). To overcome these dangers, constructing and maintaining boundaries is seen as a necessary process of exclusion. It allows organizational survival by protecting the cultural 'purity' of a given organization (Duschinsky, 2011) or profession (Hamilton, 2012, 2013; Vallas, 2001). However, this emphasis upon boundary maintenance should not lead us to neglect an important dimension of organizational life: instability and messiness (Clegg & Van Iterson, 2009; Pullen & Rhodes, 2008). In modern organizations, boundaries are actually constantly challenged and remade (Kurakin, 2013; Vallas, 2001, 2006). To take the porosity and fluidity of symbolic boundaries seriously, we need to better understand the dynamics of transgression. In particular, focusing on transgression rather than on separation and maintenance will allow us to shed light on how an idioculture can be constantly shaped and negotiated when an organization is repetitively facing symbolic threats. This is particularly relevant for the study of alternative organizations, seen here as existing in liminal spaces (Meira, 2014) in which multiple and contradictory demands intersect (Parker et al., 2014b). As they cannot fully separate from their environment and from the dangers associated with the rejected dominant social order, how do they cope with symbolic threats, and what role does transgression play in the shaping of their cultural practices?

Money is a case in point. In Simmel's opinion (2004), it is a reified symbol of capitalism. As such, it constitutes a symbolic threat to alternative organizations that wish to depart from capitalism(s). Following Mauss (2012), exchanges are above all moral as they symbolize social life and the multiple interdependencies of social groups in their larger system. However, Simmel (2004) argues that money has crystallized the whole function of exchange into an independent structure. Consequently, the monetization of the economy is often perceived as a de-socializing force (e.g. Gibson-Graham, 2006). In Tönnies view, for instance (1988), it threatens the ideals of sharing, cooperation and democracy because it is enjoyed at the exclusion of all others. According to various economic sociologists, the market-type of exchange faces cultural resistance in its attempts to establish economic values for sacred things, such as human organs, death, babies, etc. (Anteby, 2010; Belk & Wallendorf, 1990; Zelizer, 2013). This is explained by the morally dangerous quantification of quality operated by money (Zelizer, 2013). Money is seen as driving an instrumental rationalization which is at odds with alternative organizations' value-rationality (Rothschild & Whitt, 1989). Hence, money is deeply imbued with meanings that might enter into contradiction with the values defended by alternative organizations, such as cooperation and sharing (Parker et al., 2014a). Yet, most alternative organizations still rely on pecuniary resources for surviving and developing their projects (Cheney et al., 2014). Thus, money is considered here a 'dirty' object, symbolizing what is resisted while constantly transgressing boundaries.

Creative power of money as a 'dirty' object

As stated in this literature, 'dirty' objects entail a sacred power in their ability to transgress. They can pass from a state of impurity generating feelings of repulsion, to a state of purity inspiring love and gratitude (Belk & Wallendorf, 1990; Durkheim, 2012; Kurakin, 2013). In his essay on the long-standing and cross-cultural associations between money and dirt, Peebles (2012) argues that it is in money's nature to transgress categories, forcing them to blend together. In its role as a transgressor, money is a particularly dangerous object. Peebles emphasizes the importance of the ambivalence of dirt, which is simultaneously debasing and fertile. Just like filth, money is simultaneously life-sustaining and potentially dangerous. He convincingly argues that money is pure when it is fertile; that is, when it is controlled by and redistributed to the community. By contrast,

money is 'dirty' when it is sterile; that is, when it is unfairly appropriated and retained. Thus, he sees negotiating the meanings of money and regulating its flows as part of the continuous construction of social groups.

By denying the meaningfulness of the social order through transgression, 'dirty' objects possess a strong potential for creating new cultural practices. According to Mary Douglas (2004), the outcome of transgression depends on the responses provided by individuals (or groups) during their encounters with 'dirty' elements. 'There are several ways of treating anomalies. Negatively, we can ignore, just not perceive them, or perceiving we can condemn. Positively, we can deliberately confront the anomaly and try to create a new pattern of reality in which it has a place' (Douglas, 2004, p. 40). Here, the powerful potential of 'dirty' objects in the creation of a culture is clearly identified, even though this proposition is not elaborated further. A deliberate confrontation implies a transformation of daily practices and cultural representations. When boundaries are leaky, permeable and unstable, they constitute liminal occasions (Howard-Grenville, Golden-Biddle, Irwin, & Mao, 2011) in which heterogeneous forces combine to foster creativity and innovation (Thanem, 2006). In such spaces, actors borrow from different cultural toolkits to establish novel outcomes (Fine, 2004). In their study of the architecture of the Unity Temple, for instance, Jones and Massa (2013) showed how this church became a consecrated architectural exemplar by transgressing boundaries in the use of profane materials to construct a sacred place. Recognizing the power of transgression in challenging the arbitrary conditions for 'impurities' to be classified as such, Pullen and Rhodes (2008) urge us to disrupt boundaries and value disorganization.

Starting from there, this article explores processes by which people in an intentional community confront money, a specific 'dirty' object in their everyday life, using its power to create alternative cultural practices.

Methodology

Methods

This article is part of a larger research project focusing on the social organization of an intentional community, Longo Maï, described more fully below. The data collection process started in June 2012 and consisted primarily of participant observation techniques. Most of the observations, which occurred over ten visits, took place in the Principal Commune (pseudonym). The researcher also spent some time in two of the network's other communes and twice visited their offices (located in an urban 'Communal House' in Switzerland) where the accounting and fundraising activities are centralized. A total of 49 days and nights were spent in the field. During the visits, the researcher enrolled in any routine activity that was proposed. Every day, activities, meetings and interactions with community members were noted. The division of the fieldwork into short periods allowed time to organize data before proceeding to the next step (Jeffrey & Troman, 2004). To supplement the fieldwork, archival data were collected from various sources. These included newsletters and books published by Longo Maï between 1974 and 2013; 31 radio broadcasts; six books written by Longo Maï members or external actors; and several internal documents. Finally, 20 semi-structured interviews with 12 participants were conducted and transcribed. The group members initially expressed some reluctance to accept the investigation of a business school researcher, thereby influencing the data collection process and constituting an additional source of information (Devereux, 1967). The challenge of gaining participants' confidence provided insights into their perception of business and research.

The first analytical step was the writing of an exhaustive narrative account to interpret and organize observations. Money questions emerged as major yet controversial entry point to understand

how members constructed their community. The second stage of analysis focused on incidents involving money, which were then organized in first-order constructs to reflect the informant's perception of the event. These constructs were then interpreted and organized into groups to form second-order data, explaining the patterning of first-order data (Van Maanen, 1979). In the last stage of the analysis, two aggregate theoretical dimensions were proposed based on second-order constructs to describe the practices developed by community members to address questions relating to money. These interpretations and theoretical dimensions were discussed with two senior researchers. Additionally, ideas, interpretations, and earlier drafts of this paper were discussed with two community members, in order to co-construct knowledge and produce a 'more 'relevant', morally aware, and non-hierarchical research practice' (Clark, Holland, Katz, & Peace, 2009, p. 2).

The research setting

History and agenda. Longo Maï is a network of intentional communities whose creation is rooted in the political events that shook Europe at the end of the 1960s. In 1969, a group of young activists from the Austrian Communist party started to contest its bureaucratic functioning. They decided to form an independent and radical organization (Caty, 1983) to defend the rights of young people and workers with direct actions. Through the intermediary of Rémi, a French activist who became the group's charismatic leader from its creation until his death in 1993, the Austrian group met a Swiss organization sharing similar ideas. Together, they claimed the revolution by creating self-determined, democratic spaces. Facing increasing repression by the police, they decided to create communes in rural areas to experiment with alternative ways of living and organizing. They saw the construction of intentional communities as a political act in itself, constituting a way to re-appropriate their own life. In June 1973, a group of 24 young activists collectively acquired a 300-hectare field in a mountainous region of France on which they would create the first commune (referred to in this paper as 'the Principal Commune' because of its relative importance in terms of inhabitants and activities).

Today, the network is composed of about 250 people living and working together in nine communes: five in France, two in Switzerland, one in Austria, and one in Germany. They have also developed two cooperative projects that are not fully communitarian: one in Ukraine and one in Costa Rica. The Principal Commune accounts for about 80 people including 30 children. They promote a collective way of living, characterized by shared ownership. All decisions are made jointly and the group pays equal attention to the needs of each of its members, regardless of individual contributions to the collective good. They participate in social movements, principally related to political refugees, peasantry, and freedom of speech. They own and run a radio station and publish and distribute several newsletters. Remaining open to outsiders and being aware of what is going on outside the community is essential for the group, as their main goal is to: 'build a counter-project to capitalist exploitation' (Morawietz, Rössler, & Schwab, 2013). However, they stay purposely vague in defining 'capitalist exploitation' and concrete ways for building such a counter-project. This allows them to have their practices, claims and values change over time.

Money sources, uses and control. To ensure its survival, Longo Maï developed three sources of cash inflows. First, they sell part of their produce on local markets. Second, they raise funds from private donors for their political activities and solidarity projects. Third, they receive some governmental subsidies for their agricultural activities. The group strives to reconcile seemingly contradictory goals: remaining independent while having the financial resources to develop their projects (Graf, 2006). Accordingly, these sources of money create heated debates and tensions among community members. Money coming from fundraising is especially depreciated. Since its

initiation in 1974, fundraising has stood in direct conflict with the group's desire to remain independent. Fundraising is often perceived as risky, as it creates reliance on an external revenue stream that is difficult to control. This fear is exacerbated by a defamatory press campaign that occurred in 1979, in which some media outlets accused Longo Maï of being a sect. This dramatically affected donations for several years. Despite resistance to this activity, maintaining the network would be extremely challenging should the fundraising system collapse. They might have to abandon political activities, or their radio station, or reduce accommodations for visitors, thus calling Longo Maï's rationale into question. Rémi, the former charismatic leader, used his political skills and ability to build consensus (interview with Ana, one of the founders, January 2013). He proposed the creation of a newsletter for donors in 1974. Instead of a classic anonymous letter requesting funds, the newsletter presents the everyday life and projects of the communes, reflecting Longo Maï's identity and political engagement. Doing so, the newsletter writers expect donors to be activists supporting Longo Maï's view. Rémi played a major role in convincing the group that fundraising was critical to the movement's survival. As Daniel (settled in the Principal Commune since 1974) stated: 'the financial instrument created in Switzerland gives us a very important freedom of action at the political level'. Members decided to cultivate that opportunity. They expect newcomers to fully understand the important role of fundraising for the whole movement, despite its contradiction with their broad goal of constructing an alternative.

In addition, the group is always reluctant to develop large-scale commercial activities, the other important source of cash. They fear that such a process would introduce stronger concerns about productivity criteria, which could also contradict the main claims of the group. In 2008, some members started an ongoing reflexive process aimed at breaking the status quo by opening discussions across communes about the future of this economic system. This sub-group took measures to solidify fundraising and agreed on the need to diversify economic dependencies (meaning develop their productive capabilities with the goal of attaining self-sufficiency). However, that idea was approached with caution and reluctance by other participants for fear of being caught within capitalist logics.

Regarding uses and control, money is redistributed among communes within inter-cooperative meetings, in which members decide collectively for the budget devoted to their different projects. They tend to favor projects benefiting a larger number of members. They sometimes disagree with how to distribute money expenses. For all personal expenses not directly chosen and distributed by the community (such as cigarettes or clothing that participants buy in shops in the nearest small town), members share an unlocked deposit box. In a notebook, they write the amount taken and its purpose. In the Principal Commune, this common fund is not an unlocked box, as there are too many visitors. Instead, a small accounting team distributes pin money (15€ per week) to each participant on Mondays. If someone needs extra money, he or she must request it from this team (who is also responsible for the collective checkbook). Thus, cash flows are mainly controlled by a subgroup of participants. Any member can have an influence on what they do, but this indirect power sometimes raises issues, as illustrated below:

Vignette 1:

> At one Sunday meeting, Diane (one of the founders) proposed the postponement of a budget meeting because most people from the accounting team would be absent. Yet, Annabelle (settled for about 20 years) strongly objected, arguing that cash issues affected all and everyone should know how to handle them: 'I don't see why we should rearrange the meeting just because a few people would be absent! The question of dough is always taboo here; we always fight over it, yet it affects everyone. Everyone should know! Somebody told me that at one meeting – when I was absent – Vera said 'Don't ask Annabelle if you need to write a check. It's better to ask people who know.' Let me clarify: I know how to write a check!

> Everybody should know how to write a check, and where money comes from and where it goes. It affects all of us! If you want me to sign a check, there is no problem.' To that, somebody responded, 'O.K., I want a check, then!' Others followed with: 'Me too!' People started laughing and moved on to another topic. (Field notes, November 2012)

This vignette exemplifies how disagreements regarding money control, uses and sources are expressed within the community. Money is depicted as a taboo manipulated by a few specialists yet affecting everyone. It is taboo because it is prone to introduce (dangerous) capitalist arrangements, making most members unwilling to deal with it. The creation of a team of specialists composed of the few members accepting to compromise is seen as a solution for ensuring the economic survival of the group, despite this overall reluctance to participate. However, it raises democratic issues, threatening one of Longo Maï's core values. The oldest members believe that money is necessary for the group's survival despite the dependency it creates, whilst several newcomers and visitors push forward the idea of 'living without money'. For the latter, Longo Maï's economic model should completely exclude monetary exchanges. Such beliefs exacerbate the tensions existing around money and heighten its status as a dirty object.

Findings: Dealing with Money as Transgressor

The question to be addressed concerns the group's response to the symbolic threat that money poses to its effort in establishing an alternative social order. Of central interest are the practices used by members to neutralize threats associated with money: an impure or 'dirty' presence that contradicts Longo Maï's central purpose. Two salient set of practices – *distancing* and *re-appropriation* – are discussed below.

Distancing practices

Even if attitudes toward money vary among community members, a fairly clear three-dimensional *distancing* pattern appears in the way members daily neutralize threats.

Symbolic distancing. The first dimension brings together all the discursive techniques used to symbolically downplay the dirty object and its role. First, they use expressions of disdain and pejorative terms (such as 'fric', the French equivalent of 'dough') to qualify money. Money is generally looked down upon as it symbolizes capitalism and consumerism. Sam (settled since the 1970s) refers somewhat cynically to the 'bureaucrats' when talking about the group's fundraisers. Caroline (a resident of Commune A – pseudonym – since the 1980s) summed up the feelings of many members by describing money as a means rather than an end; something to be neither valued nor accumulated. Second, members express some reservations when discussing money and fundraising, resulting in the frequent use of metaphors and euphemisms. For example, donors are referred to as a 'circle of friends' (a reference not immediately apparent to the researcher). When questioned about this expression, Daniel responded, 'We are very modest when it comes to fundraising activities. And "circle of friends" is sweeter, don't you think?' Similarly, the fundraising offices are referred to as the 'Communal House'. Finally, symbolic distancing also takes the form of *de-dramatization*, which we see at the end of Vignette 1, when the tensions emerging around money questions are defused by humor. Here we observe that a member wants to put economic questions at the center of the debate, stating the importance of money flows in organizational life. However, the relevance of this issue is denied by the use of humor. De-dramatization allows the group to move forward and tackle other – more important – topics, silencing inquiries about money

management. Doing so, members symbolically distance money questions from issues perceived as really important and necessitating deeper discussions.

Technical distancing. The second dimension refers to the source of Diane's complaint illustrated in Vignette 1: that few members specialize in money management. The great majority do not participate in accounting, fundraising, selling in local markets, or administrating their few touristic lodges. Some explicitly oppose commercial activities. When a community member invited Pierre (settled since 2011) to sell produce at a local market, he replied: 'Are you serious? Do you think I am the kind of guy that sells in local markets?' The group chooses to limit commercial activities to face-to-face exchanges and refuses to exchange anonymously. They do not seek clients or customers but develop their goods or products only when invited to do so by outsiders. The lack of participation in fundraising activities is even more stringent. Most participants view fundraising as a necessary burden. Sam compares it to 'a national … a collective service for Longo Maï: we all need dough' (interview, January 2013). After settling in the network for 'some years' (the period is purposely not defined by the members), every participant is expected to contribute to the group's fundraising activities. This entails spending about one month each year in the Communal House making phone calls, writing letters, etc. This turnover is rather symbolic for Ana, as participants are neither necessarily comfortable with fundraising nor good at it. According to Daniel, some newcomers are frightened to ask for funds because they don't understand Longo Maï's financial system: 'for someone who has just moved into Longo Maï, fundraising is another world!' Such individuals will perform 'work without consequences', meaning they converse with potential donors about activities and projects without asking for money. Ana estimates that only one-third of the members go to the Communal House once a year to participate in fundraising.

To address this reluctance to participate, the group created specialized teams. There is an accounting team devoted to daily budget administration in the Principal Commune, and a small team living in the Communal House that is responsible for fundraising. This distancing mechanism allows most members to avoid dealing directly with money calculations and taking responsibility for budget administration. However, this response to the symbolic threat creates conflicts, as knowledge specialization contradicts the principles of direct democracy and equality defended by the group. Members sometimes exercise control by questioning the validity of this form of specialization and by asking for more collective discussions on these topics (see Vignette 1).

Time/space distancing. The third dimension is a relative degree of *time/space distancing* which is crystallized in the organization of the activities. Commercial exchanges usually take place outside the communes, in local markets and tourist lodges that are physically distanced from the communes. As seen earlier, all fundraising activities are centralized in the Communal House and intercooperative meetings (to decide about redistribution) take place twice a year in one of the communes. These meetings are open to all members, and each commune is represented (except for Commune A, which doesn't partake in fundraising – see below). A distribution key was established several years earlier based on the needs of individual communes without much debate today. For exceptional expenses, projects from all communes are presented and discussed, with members establishing a priority list for expenditures. These meetings bind budget discussions in space and time. Therefore, everyday life in the communes is detached from these functions, and no payments for products or services take place within the communes. For instance, on my way back from the Principal Commune after staying a week there in July 2012, I had to pay for gasoline, tolls, and a sandwich. Right then I realized I hadn't used any money for an entire week. The community was supporting my needs without any consideration of my contribution (or absence of contribution) to the collective good.

Re-appropriating practices

Threats are neutralized through *re-appropriation* when a direct confrontation leads members to re-negotiate the meanings and cultural practices associated with money. Three sets of re-appropriating practices have been observed.

Segmenting and legitimating. This refers to practices in which members negotiate and justify the meanings of monies according to their uses and sources. They continuously redefine 'good' vs. 'bad' money as a group, while allowing for different interpretations among individuals. Hence, they nurture heterogeneity in monies' meanings.

Expenditures raise discussions when collective money is used for individual interests. For example, many participants own a mobile phone, and bills are supported by the common fund. Non-users regard these as huge and unnecessary expenses, as there is a collective fixed phone in each commune. It is also the case when the acquisition of goods follows a rational of accumulation rather than affordable alternatives. Attention is put on recycling materials, for instance.

Heterogeneity also prevails in legitimating the sources of money. Commercial activities are generally acceptable when they remain on a small scale, because it allows members to develop direct interactions with customers. Even if some members would like to increase the group's productive capacities to balance money inflows, economic incentives are not sufficient to take such a decision. For instance, they used to produce raspberries and sell most of their produce in local markets. This generated significant income. Yet, they decided to stop when the team lost its motivation and interest toward this activity. Enjoying work is an important dimension for legitimating a source of revenue. Inversely, a new team was motivated to start the production again few years later. They legitimized further this activity, claiming that its revenues would serve one of the group's core aims: accommodating politically engaged visitors, to become a 'hub' or a 'school' for alternatives (Morawietz et al., 2013). This was maintained even though there was no formal control for the actual use of raspberry sales – money used for visitors and for settlers is not differentiated in accounting forms.

The absence of consensus regarding fundraising as a legitimate source of revenue is evident, as illustrated by the case of Commune A. Before joining Longo Maï in 1991, Commune A was a small and rather poor family-farm. Being part of the network allowed the family-farm to acquire a new house. In 1994, Commune A benefited from Longo Maï's fundraising system to buy 14 hectares of forests (*Messages de Longo Maï* no. 65, June 1996). However, the group living there found this system unacceptable and decided to separate from all fundraising activities in 2001, while remaining in Longo Maï's network. They expressed several reasons for this separation. First and as Bruno (born on the former family-farm) explains, the sudden improvement in living standards of the farm was not well received by the surrounding population. Commune A members faced continuous criticism from their neighbors about their 'reliance' on donations. Second, the fundraising system is not easy to teach according to Pascal (born in the former family-farm), and cannot survive forever. He also believes that relying on fundraising is a matter of convenience, which drives people away from the value of things. Developing a productive infrastructure allowed Commune A to appreciate the monetary values of goods again. Caroline shares Pascal's opinion, stating that fundraising turns into 'assistantship' and 'This is not what we want to teach our children'. Pascal states further that, 'We have so many skilled people here that it is nonsense to ask for donations!' Commune A members proudly challenge themselves to find alternative solutions to cover daily expenses. For example, the development of traditional woodwork activities such as carpentry and horse skidding[1] has helped them to move closer to the self-organizing ideal: 'It gives us dignity', according to Caroline. By refusing to participate in inter-cooperative meetings, Commune A members feel somewhat

marginalized. However, they frequently travel to and receive people from other communes of the network. They also offer them free woodwork and carpentry services. For Commune A members, fundraising is associated with charity and donations, and as such constitutes an unacceptable source of money. They will accept subsidies from fundraising only if those funds target specific investment projects, but not for small projects aimed at increasing their comfort. Hence, for Commune A, subsidies are better accepted than donations, but the most rewarding source of revenue is still selling the fruits of their labor.

Segmenting and legitimating practices constitute an ongoing reflexive process through which the group doesn't aim at reaching a full consensus. Legitimation often invokes a framing pattern in which localized spending is connected to broader social and political issues. For instance, the (fragmentary) acceptance of fundraising is discursively justified by the realization that in its absence, the community would be unable to continue its political actions, thereby losing its reason to be. Using money for personal expenses is legitimized with a reference to principles of equality and community, as everyone benefits equally from the unlocked deposit boxes (or pin money).

Purifying by politicizing. Purification occurs when (at least) part of the money received from the predominant system of exchange is given back for higher political goals and actions. That is, exchanges are politicized during the purification process. However, purifying by politicizing is an ongoing and shifting process. As there are neither written rules nor a clear ideology, there can only be *instances* of purification which are open to contestation and reframing. For instance, purification occurs when money earned through raspberry sales is *actually* used to welcome visitors. Here, money is 'given back' outside the community and channeled towards raising Longo Maï's political impact. In some cases, purification operates with money staying inside the community. For example, Nareg (settled since the 1970s) is responsible for the forests in the Principal Commune. He also teaches lumberjacking and alternative forestry management in a specialized school outside Longo Maï. He receives a salary and repays it to the Principal Commune's common fund. The danger here lies in money being issued by the dominant society in the form of salaried work. For community members, this represents an unacceptable type of contract that establishes a relationship of subordination. The purification process operates through money redistribution, but in this case it stays inside the community. The danger is neutralized when the individual salary earned by Nareg is redistributed to the entire group. In addition, the salaried activity is legitimized by its educational/political content: the diffusion of traditional, eco-friendly forestry management practices. Yet, it doesn't mean that the group now accepts salaried work, nor that everyone agrees with Nareg's activities.

The politicization of exchanges is materialized through diverse daily practices. Hence, on Longo Maï's stands in local markets one finds political leaflets, along with clothes and edible products. This invites discussion on broad social issues with would-be customers. Additionally, near the Principal Commune, street-interviews on recent political events are recorded during local market days for the group's radio station. The political engagement of the community is assimilated in the products themselves:

> On our farms, we intend to be as independent as possible from this market society, and we defend values of sharing and solidarity. We practice sharing between our farms and with friends, but we also sell our products on local markets; it constitutes an important income for our farms. People buy our products for different reasons. Some are looking for quality organic products, while others want to support us or to express their opposition to the 'prevailing market.' They are often politically and ecologically aware. (Daniel, email – 01 April 2014)

Products reflect political choices made along the production process. They are made by self-organizing groups who use traditional production techniques. Whenever possible, members integrate all the production steps. Wool products are a good example, as the group has developed a full mastery of the sector from shepherding to manufacturing clothes. This activity does not generate much revenue but incorporates a highly symbolic character: it is the result of many political actions. Wool products embody the idea of producing not for economic value but for reaffirming the value of old peasantry heritage and artisanal practices. The educational and political purpose of commercial exchanges is similarly visible in the services they sell. In Commune A, for instance, they consciously accept unprofitable horse-skidding sites to promote this eco-friendly technique, with the hope of disseminating it in opposition to industrial deforestation: 'Sometimes, people reproduce this idea and train themselves to lumber with horses' (Manolo, born in the former family farm, August 2013). Nonetheless, these instances of purification are incomplete and repeatedly challenged by different community members.

Substituting. The constant testing of exchange practices in which community members replace money with the development of face-to-face, interpersonal relationships is referred to as *substituting practices*. This process is obviously incomplete, as Longo Maï uses money for acquiring products and services from outside. Still, the continuous attempts at substituting money with personal relationships reflect the group's desire to transform and re-appropriate their economy. In particular, the reduction of monetary exchanges facilitates the mutual enjoyment of self-produced goods and services. Marie (settled since 2007) explains: 'Most of the needs are covered by the community, such as food, housing, medicines, cars, travels, leisure. … Normally, we need money to meet these needs. In this community, we provide for our members' (Interview, July 2012). To be effective, this reciprocal enjoyment and provision of goods necessitates avoiding any calculation of equivalences regarding the various ways of contributing to the collective good. It implies that every type of 'work' – understood as any form of participation in the collective life – must have the same value, as illustrated in Vignette 2:

Vignette 2:

> My daughter accompanied me during one visit to Commune A, preventing me from fully participating in some agricultural activities. When I expressed guilt over this, Manolo and Caroline were really surprised by my concerns and noted that caring for the children was as important as any other function for the well-being of the commune. Caroline added that even if some members bring in outside money through their woodworking capabilities, the non-financial contributions of those who stay in the commune is just as valuable to collective life. (Field notes, August 2013)

This form of exchange based on sharing is extended to the entire network. Hence, each commune offers its products and services to other communes when needed. For instance, Commune A does the carpentry work and other communes redistribute jellies, wool blankets, wines, etc. Sharing complementary products and knowledge increases the network's self-sufficiency. According to Ana, this system could be jeopardized if money should be directly redistributed from one commune to another. This might introduce inequalities between communes regarding their external revenue streams. The fundraising system helps to guard against this by centralizing resources for all communes, thereby substituting a system of equivalence with one of sharing without creating debts or expected return. To practice and sustain such an economy, they rely on deep interpersonal bonds, which form the basis of their solidarity. For instance, sharing practices are extended to most commodities (there is one washing machine for 40 people, one car for 10, members regularly lend their rooms to outsiders, etc.).

The substitution of money with the development of interpersonal bonds is extended to economic exchanges outside the network. For instance, the Principal Commune frequently assists a neighbor farmer in harvesting olive trees. Although they do not ask anything in return, the farmer generally gives them back olive oil and firewood (deciding the appropriate quantities by himself). Commune A is engaged in producing flour, but lacking their own bread oven, they have developed friendly relations with a baker. They give him all their flour and he gives them the bread they need in return. The baker uses any residual flour for his own commercial production. On one occasion, this baker got sick and could not bake. Marika (settled in Commune A since 2013) spent two days in his bakery to replace him. She performed this work for free, not only to ensure the commune's provision of bread, but also to help the baker maintain his commercial activities.

The group does not regard exchange as a purely economic matter: for them, it must include the possibility of meeting people and creating friendships. Face-to-face relationships are highly valued; they attach great importance to welcoming visitors. They refuse entering into anonymous markets as they fear being compelled to introduce yield calculations into their activities. Hence, they are struggling to develop ways to increase their revenues from production while embedding their exchange practices in interpersonal relationships. This association of monetary exchanges with ideas of personal bonds could be summarized by a title the group used in a newsletter: 'Markets, Provincial markets, Arab markets, flower markets, a word that evokes gatherings, exchanges, and conviviality' (*Messages de Longo Maï no. 48*, October 1991). As discussed earlier, this principle is also highly apparent in their fundraising practices. The group intends to develop close relationships with donors by sending them self-made presents for Christmas, visiting major donors, and encouraging them to visit the communes. For instance, during fieldwork in Commune A, a couple of donors showed up unexpectedly for a visit. Solene invited them to stay for lunch, and we ate together as usual. Donors were treated as any other visitors and members engaged them in personal conversations. These practices contribute toward reducing anonymity. For Daniel, 'friendly encounters' occur when participating in fundraising. One of their newsletter's title concerning touristic facilities devoted to donors is particularly revealing: 'We were expecting customers, but friends came in' (*Messages de Longo Maï no. 57*, November 1993). Through these various practices, Longo Maï's members try to replace – as far as they can – anonymous monetary exchanges with a form of relational economy based on personal ties and a system of sharing.

Discussion

Tensions emanating from the dependency on the predominant system of exchanges can threaten alternative organizations in their daily activities (Cheney et al., 2014; Rothschild & Whitt, 1989). Yet, this study illuminates the role of these tensions in creating alternative cultural practices. It brings a positive outlook to symbolic threats by showing how the sacred power of 'dirty' objects can be transformed into a creative power for the organization, thus reaffirming the ambiguous nature of such elements (Kurakin, 2013). More importantly, it adds to Mary Douglas's theory of pollution (2004) by unveiling ways through which new patterns of reality are created from the confrontation with dirty objects. Through everyday acts, participants neutralize the threats associated with money in two ways: they simultaneously distance themselves from money and reappropriate the economy by creating a relational and politicized culture of exchanges. Following Sykes and Matza (1957), neutralizing demands for conformity from the larger society is an essential prerequisite for performing deviant behavior. They argue that neutralizing these demands – that is, redefining the situation so that the deviant behavior will be perceived as appropriate – is essential to avoid the feelings of guilt, shame or fear stemming from inappropriate actions. By lessening the effectiveness of social control, techniques of neutralization *enable* the performance of

divergent behaviors. This paper shows that similar neutralizing practices trigger the creation and maintenance of alternative ways of life. Alternative organizations regularly meet demands for conforming to the dominant – capitalist – social order in which they are embedded. These demands constitute a symbolic threat to the creation of alternative cultural practices which are, in Longo Maï, represented by money.

By neutralizing such demands for conformity through *distancing practices*, members redefine a situation in which money questions become unimportant and detached from daily life. This is a necessary condition for questioning the social order and re-creating cultural norms and practices. While most authors have focused on the negative side of distancing (e.g. Douglas, 2004; Duschinsky, 2011; Thanem, 2006), the present article unveils the positive aspect of such practices by emphasizing its role as trigger and facilitator in the creation of new idiocultural practices. Distancing invites participants to be reflexive and critical toward the uses and functions of money. As analyzed by Howard-Grenville and colleagues (2011) in their study of cultural change within three organizations, time/space distancing processes – such as bracketing – help in shaping liminal occasions that favor cultural creation and symbolic recombination through mundane practices. For instance, organizing inter-cooperative meetings twice a year in a peripheral commune of the network serves to bracket budget planning discussions from everyday activities life and it opens new channels for relating. By encouraging members to select behaviors from diverse cultural toolkits (see Fine, 2004), distancing practices facilitate a process of collective recombination of symbols and meanings. In addition, technical and symbolic distancing entails disdain for money-related activities. There is a status inversion compared to what is normalized in the dominant order: the activities that bring most revenues to the community are regarded as 'dirty work'. This is a condition for constructing an economic model in which each activity has the same value so that calculation of equivalences remains ineffective. Hence, the neutralization of threats through distancing practices facilitates the redirection of their power towards the creation of alternative idiocultures.

As is illustrated in the complex account of a meeting where a member insists that money is important and should not be avoided (Vignette 1), the presence of distancing practices actually reveals the continuous dialectic existing between acts of ordering and impulses for disorder. Even if the importance of money for the survival of the group is often negated, there are recurrent pushes toward more open discussions on this topic. This dialectic is precisely what constitutes the symbolic threat driving neutralizing responses. Put differently, this vignette shows that processes of ordering and resistance co-exist and mutually reinforce each other. What matters, then, is not so much how some objects are excluded from – or included in – a system of belief, but rather the dynamics of transgression constituting the daily life of organizations. Building on Pullen and Rhodes' (2008) acknowledgement of the mutuality between organization and disorganization, this study extends the theoretical discussion of boundary work beyond the question of inclusion/exclusion. Far for being reduced to practices of boundary maintenance, this approach offers a more nuanced understanding of distancing practices by highlighting their role in the shaping of new cultural meanings and practices. Adopting this perspective can be particularly useful for studying alternative organizations. Following the work of Ashforth and Reingen (2014) and Meira (2014), this approach claims that some tensions are not only inherent to such organizations, but also necessary in shaping their specific culture. In addition, it draws on the concept of impurity to reassess the moral underpinning of organizing (Clegg & van Iterson, 2009). Integrating this dimension is particularly needed to dig into the 'value-rationality' (Rothschild & Whitt, 1989) of alternatives. More importantly, it invites scholars to move beyond a reductive vision of alternatives, in which they are either inside or outside capitalism. Instead of focusing on issues of degeneration (e.g. Storey, Basterretxea, & Salaman, 2014) and of the degree of 'alternativeness' (e.g. Flecha & Ngai, 2014), it opens new research avenues for studying the everyday making of dissent idiocultures.

While distancing builds the necessary conditions for cultural creation, new cultural practices emerge out of mundane acts of neutralization through *re-appropriation*. When confronted with threats associated with money, members experiment with multiple alternative exchange practices allowing them to transform and re-appropriate the economy. Instead of protecting the boundaries between 'pure' and 'dirty' objects, community members directly confront money by constantly blurring and renegotiating these boundaries. This echoes the view of culture as a dynamic and constantly re-negotiated process, driven by both symbolic and material impulses (Brannen & Salk, 2000; Grant, Morales, & Sallaz, 2009). In line with Fine (1984), openness to heterogeneity and change is seen as necessary for developing alternative idiocultures, as it helps members to construct multiple cultural practices based on negotiated orders that are only provisional. Longo Maï's case shows that cultural forms are constantly developing and that fragmentation and acceptance of ambiguity facilitates the creation of new ones. Testing multiple practices through which members build a way to live together (a culture), constitutes another possible basis for organizing; one in which messiness is valued by participants as a source of creativity. This enriches our understanding of alternative organizations' dynamics, showing how their dependency toward the larger system can be turned into a continuous dialogue fostering their creativity and development.

Using Merton's (1938) terms, we observe that Longo Maï's members reject both the cultural goals and institutionalized means of the larger social structure. As such, they constantly try to substitute them with other cultural practices. Trialing is essential in this collective process of cultural [re]generation: Community members are on a continuous quest to develop and perfect an alternative to what Biggart and Delbridge (2004) call the 'price system of exchange'. In particular, Longo Maï's members experiment with a system in which monetary exchanges are reduced to the minimum. These practices are different from barter, as they are characterized by a constant attempt to eliminate equivalences' standards. The mere idea of reciprocity drives exclusion according to Douglas and Isherwood (2002). At Longo Maï, members are not replacing money with other standards such as working hours as it is the case within some alternative currency movements (see North, 2007). Instead, they commit to a principle of 'complex equality' – to use Polletta's terminology (2002) – for which differences in skills are not seen as compromising equal status. Here, any type of contribution to the collective life is equally valued, and goods are mutually enjoyed. These practices are akin to 'sharing economies' (Rehn, 2014) and render each member responsible for the collective well-being. This alternative culture of exchanges stems from the development of interpersonal connections as opposed to the anonymity of classic market exchanges. As Simmel and Wolff argue (1950), money is the purest symbol of the anonymous society: people can be replaced in exchange relations without bearing any impact in the transaction. Hence, 'resisting' money can constitute a basis for crafting an oppositional idioculture. In Longo Maï, exchanges cannot be developed between strangers; they must be based on interpersonal relations. By neutralizing demands for conformity through *re-appropriation*, members reinterpret the situation of economic exchanges as a product of friendship. Developing such a culture of exchanges is thought as inherently oppositional, as it contradicts the underlying assumptions of the liberal economy which are based on a society of indifferent strangers according to Silver (1990). Hence, it is in reasserting the importance of face-to-face interactions and interpersonal relations in a society of increasingly mediated communication that Longo Maï constructs itself as an activist community. Besides, by enlarging these practices to exchanges outside the communes, members encourage outsiders to modify their own practices. They re-create an economy which Shanin (1990) would qualify as 'relational,' similar to those usually found in European peasant societies before the industrial revolution. In these ways members are able to maintain an oppositional culture, protecting its very nature as a fluid, non-dogmatic and dynamic philosophy of praxis that reasserts the primacy of social life over market transactions. This contributes to a process of collective empowerment, as

the group becomes aware of its capacity to self-determine the conditions of its own life (Coleman, 1968; Gregoire & Perlman, 1969; Rao & Dutta, 2012), by redefining the circumstances and structures of exchanges. The re-socialization of the economy also transforms the way people relate to one another, as a sense of trust and collective responsibility becomes essential for the exchanges to happen. Face-to-face interactions reinforce a feeling of belonging and collective responsibility, making people conscious and confident in their capacity of acting together. Hence, focusing on disorder and the dynamics of transgression allows us to make sense of alternative organizing as an open-ended process (Parker et al., 2014a) in which the economy is collectively questioned (Gibson-Graham, 2006).

This ethnographic study of an intentional community shows how neutralizing threats emanating from transgression and disorder creates culture within alternative organizations. A diversity of 'dirty' objects can be identified in organizations, and potentially modify their idioculture. Analyzing responses to dirty objects contributes to research on the creation and maintenance of cultures inside organizations by stressing the beneficial power of dangerous elements (Kurakin, 2013) and of disorder (Pullen & Rhodes, 2008). Distancing practices form the necessary conditions to nurture reflexivity and change (Howard-Grenville et al., 2011), thus facilitating experimentation with new cultural practices in which the 'dirty' object is transformed and re-appropriated. The aggregation of these practices results in the neutralization of threats, as the threatening power of the 'dirty' object is transformed into a creative one that benefits the organization. Neutralizing acts create culture as they shape new meanings and practices through interactions; these then translate into an original, socially-learned togetherness.

Conclusion

From an empirical exploration of how members of an intentional community create an idioculture out of symbolic threats, this study opens new avenues for examining the cultural dynamics of organizations. Considering organizations as projects in-becoming rather than fully realized structures unveils processes of cultural creation stemming from the often neglected impulses toward disorganization (Pullen & Rhodes, 2008). Adopting such a perspective can extend research on boundary work beyond the issues of inclusion/exclusion, to concentrate on their porous and instable dynamics. Further work could illuminate different processes of change involving the impure in more hierarchical settings, in which the confrontation to symbolic threats might be more controlled. For instance, exploring how actors are allowed (or prevented) to participate in the daily reinterpretation of the organization's culture through the manipulation of 'dirty' elements, could contribute to research on creative resistance (Courpasson, Dany, & Clegg, 2012; Courpasson & Dany, 2009).

This study advances our understanding of how alternative organizations respond to the challenge of being embedded in a system while resisting it. Instead of considering economic dependency as an insurmountable weakness, it shows that alternative organizations can be created and sustained through appropriating the power of impure objects. By re-creating a culture of exchanges based on interpersonal ties and equality, Longo Maï neutralizes the monetary threat by re-socializing the economy (Gibson-Graham, 2006). They propose a different way to relate to one another – that is, an alternative culture based on strong interpersonal bonds and on the principle of equality. Doing so, they provide a model for collective empowerment and participate in illustrating how the re-appropriation and transformation of local economies can serve as a meaningful way to resist the predominant system of exchange (Courpasson & Dany, 2009; Gibson-Graham, 2006). Economic exchanges might become fertile again, by transforming into a socializing force valuable to the entire community.

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to the people of Longo Maï for allowing me to intrude on their day-to-day life. I am deeply grateful for the remarkable guidance and support of Galit Ailon, and for the constructive feedbacks of the three anonymous reviewers. I would like to warmly thank David Courpasson, Steven Vallas, Ignasi Marti and Tapiwa Seremani for their inspiring advice and encouragement at different stages of this article's journey.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Note

1. Traditional woodwork technique of cutting and transporting logs pulled by horses, in forests.

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Author biography

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