

A fierce religion of itself – Stuart Tait

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Introduction

I was very pleased to be invited by Aoileann to come and talk here today and in that invitation it was suggested that I might produce something developed from my work on molecular collaboration. My research has always followed what might be referred to as a rhizomatic process. By rhizomatic, I mean a process that starts from an immanent position and makes connections outwards from there, linking ideas together; in this case, with a political inflection because of the themes of the workshop. My research for this presentation started with the notion of molecular collaboration, which I developed out of my own art practice as research, and explored how that concept may operate within transformative politics, specifically revolutionary praxis.

I feel that it is important to clarify that I am primarily an artist rather than an academic and I imagine my political research is going to be sparse compared with the majority of people present. I would, therefore, like to characterize myself as an enthusiast, which Félix Guattari contrasted with the academic by writing that

'There are two methods of receiving theoretical statements: the academic's way is to take, *or* leave, the text as it stands, whereas the enthusiast's way is to take it *and* leave it, manipulating it as he sees fit, trying to use it to throw light on his circumstances and direct his life. The point is to try and make the text work.' (Guattari, 1984: 254)

It appears to me that there may be certain thinkers and writers being sidelined within academia because of their emphasis on decentralization, deterritorialisation, and bottom-up power structures. Perhaps the academy wants to maintain its hegemony and wants to exclude theorists that would challenge this. It seems to be part of the general shift to the centre right that might be exemplified by the incorporation of the post-1992 universities. The change from technological polytechnics, which might be associated with more working class industries to universities with a more middle class, academic emphasis. This may seem like an odd claim to make, given the commitment to Marxist and critical theory in most humanities departments, but I'd like to suggest that these are still based on the kind of molar politics that states and state-like structures like the academy love.

This might sound paranoid, since I don't hold an academic position and have no affiliation to any institution, but paranoia in the sense of what John Cussans, after Dali, calls the Paranoid-Critical Method, and which in Deleuze and Guattari's terms might be called schizoanalysis; connecting the dots, making connections between different forces at play and evaluating the dominations that emerge.

Historical Materialism

As I've said, I'm sure those present are much more familiar than I am with this material, but please bear with me while I work through some history. Marx's historical materialism concerns the necessity for humans to produce and reproduce the material requirements for life. The specific social relations engaged in by people, he calls 'production relations' with some people owning the means of production and thereby exploiting others, living off them. There are various stages of production relations that sketch out a roughly liberatory historical trajectory: a prehistoric or primitive tribal society, ancient (slavery based) civilization, feudalism and capitalism. For Marx, the logical next step in humanity's historical struggle was state communism. Marx was wrong. State communism has historically led to a reinstatement of the same oppressive structures as before the revolution, as in the cases of the Soviet Union and China.

Marx was clearly right in stating that the structures and institutions of society originate in its economic base, with laws and institutions being designed to maintain the superstructure. Some anarchists advocate the total overthrow of all state structures, which obviously has an emotional appeal but, without transforming the economic base, this would be likely to leave us at the mercy of corporate oligarchs and Google battalions.

Revolutions

Marx, on the one hand, predicts the breakdown of class-based human conflict, while at the same time advocating a revolutionary party to manage the state. It seems to me that this inevitably installs a revised form of class system as it did in France, Russia and anywhere a revolution has transformed the state without transforming the state's apparatus.

Because of the relative tragedies of past revolutions, like those of the Bolsheviks and Jacobins, and their unforeseen backlashes, it is important to not engage in a Blanquist revolution and be very clear about exit strategies. These revolutions were bloody affairs against specific groups of people, rather than against structures and tended to lead to property and power simply changing hands into the hands of either the bourgeoisie, in the case of France, or a political elite, in the case of the Soviet Union.

The notion that socialism automatically leads to equality was challenged as early as the late 19th Century. In his address to the First Congress of the Central Committee of the League for Peace and Freedom in Geneva, Mikhail Bakunin famously stated that 'we are convinced that liberty without socialism is privilege, injustice; and that socialism without liberty is slavery and brutality.' (Bakunin, 1867) Bakunin's proposals for a form of socialism that deliberately eschewed control by a revolutionary state party or vanguard were repeatedly rebuffed by socialists of his era and led to his being expelled from the

First International by Marx in 1872. Georges Bataille's analysis of past revolutions confirms Bakunin's account and he insists that 'revolutionary struggles, by annihilating a religious world that had become empty, then by annihilating themselves, have left the field clear for the military. In other words, it is possible to say that the main result of the great European revolutions has been the development of national militarisms.' (Caillois, 1938/1988: 146-7) The state, including state communism, is an essentially military form because a top-down, pyramidal, hierarchical, chain-of-command structure is the most expedient means to maintain a disciplined army. This only works, however, if the majority of people in the command structure follow orders obediently, which led Bakunin to suggest that not all revolutions need to be violent, but could *undermine* the structures of the state instead. However, the militaristic form of states does make any isolated revolutionary action or autonomous zone, like the Ukrainian free territory of 1918-21 vulnerable to attack from states that feel threatened by their autonomy.

According to Bakunin's analysis, individuals are the product of the social environments in which they are born and live. They continue to submit to these influences as they develop. Just as those people branded 'criminals' under laws designed to protect an elite's property and power are victims of that social environment, so are the oppressors and exploiters products of that social structure. (Bakunin, 1869/1971: 149-50) Therefore, wrote Bakunin,

'to make a successful revolution, it is necessary to attack conditions and material goods; to destroy property and the State. It will then become unnecessary to destroy men and be condemned to suffer the sure and inevitable reaction which no massacre has ever failed and ever will fail to produce in every society.' (Bakunin, 1869/1971: 151)

Bakunin's assertion that the popular revolution would naturally organize itself into a new form of revolutionary, bottom-up organization of power composed of an alliance of industrial and agricultural collectives may seem naïve at first glance. Why would society naturally reorganize itself in this way when it hadn't after previous revolutions? How is this miracle of self-organisation supposed to happen? It would, he wrote, be facilitated through a special organ of the revolution that performed an advisory and steering role: 'the secret and universal association of the International Brothers.' (sic) The general idea here is for there to be a dispersed network of revolutionaries that spread among the population 'ideas which give expression to their instincts' and then, once there is a popular uprising, to form a kind of 'revolutionary general staff'. Bakunin derived this model of organization from the French revolution. The more than 7,000 clubs of the Society of the Friends of the Constitution (known as The Jacobin Club) were dispersed across France and were situated as the most influential force in the French uprising until the more conservative reaction that eventually lead to a consolidation of power in the Consulate and, ultimately, Napoleon Bonaparte as emperor. Bakunin's proposal is that simply by members of the secret society not holding any official posts, the people would develop a bottom-up form of social organization.

This seems optimistic to me, but the initial success of the French revolution certainly suggests that secret societies are a viable form of revolutionary organization worth investigating.

Secret Societies

Bakunin's proposed revolution of the secret society is rhizomatic in nature, growing from multiple secret nodes simultaneously, from everywhere at once, like the French example, but he still retains the idea of a central committee, albeit without official posts. (Bakunin, 1866/1971: 101) So, while Bakunin's proposal is structurally molecular, it is still ideologically molar, with the central steering group making sure every cell is running the same program. The international brotherhood's function is to wait and act as revolutionary intermediaries *when* there is a popular uprising. The brotherhood in 1984 is an obvious parody of Bakunin, with members forbidden from admitting to being members to anyone, even another member. It would theoretically be possible for the membership of the brotherhood to be coextensive with all of society without any of its member knowing this. All members would all be 'faking' membership of the Party but would not be able to communicate that fact to other members of the brotherhood. Would a revolution be possible under such circumstances, as a kind of revolution by accidental, explosive glitch?

On March 19th 1938, Bataille gave a presentation to the College of Sociology from notes provided by Roger Caillois, who could not attend. In the surviving text it is sometimes difficult to tell if we are reading Bataille or Caillois' words and I think we can read it as a genuinely collective text.

For Bataille and Caillois, the secret society is 'a form of secondary organization that possesses constant characteristics and to which recourse is always possible when the primary organization of society can no longer satisfy all the desires that arise'. (Caillois, 1938/1988: 149) The secret society is not 'secret' in the usual sense of the word, because its membership is not necessarily unknown, but the society is formed around some kind mysterious element such as technical knowledge, magic or mythology. This is the form of a cult in the traditional sense of the word. Dominant and administrative society is encrusted and heavy, dominated by rulers, government, priests and old men. The secret society ruptures and disrupts this, injecting energy. (Caillois, 1938/1988: 150-1)

Throughout history, the secret society or cult has been the only means for societies that have arrived at a void or stagnant stasis to open a space for 'a sort of sloughing off that is explosive?' (Caillois, 1938/1988: 153)

Bataille and Caillois also ask us to distinguish between secret societies and those Marcel Mauss calls 'conspiratorial societies' which are those societies formed with a specific aim distinct from their own existence. The secret society is formed expressly for its own sake, simply to exist. (Caillois, 1938/1988: 154-5) For Caillois, the main power of the secret society comes from its negation of the 'principle of necessity in the name of which all contemporary mankind collaborates to waste existence.' It is, by

principle, opposed to political structures that would make necessary the founding rule of all human activity and they express the right to exist without having to justify that existence with use-value. (Caillois, 1938/1988: 155) The secret society is formed for no other purpose than its own existence, as if the group calls itself into existence, and it may be a single isolated group or it may be 'linked with other groupings of the same sort existing in neighboring societies.' (Caillois, 1938/1988: 150)

Yet the secret society performs a kind of deterritorialising role for society even though it is not formed *in order* to perform that function.

The disruptive, scrambling effect of the secret society also appears in the ethnographic studies of Victor Turner in what he refers to as 'liminal rites' performed by cults in a tribal setting. Liminal rites, such as rites of passage perform one function as a transition for the initiate from one segment of their life to another and another as a state of effervescent *communitas* for the cult itself.

'Communitas is a nonstructured relationship, or, better, a spontaneously structured relationship which often develops among liminaries, individuals in passage between social statuses and cultural states that have been cognitively defined, logically articulated, and endowed with jural rights and obligations.' (Turner, 1975: 22)

Periodically, clans or tribes celebrate rituals to transform sedentary life into a 'concentrated exaltation of collective energies' and the intensity fosters a sense of having reached a different mode of existence. In this state, people feel, think, and behave differently than they usually would. (Richman, 1995: 63) This ecstatic trance state is synonymous with Spinoza's 'joy' as the passage from one form of knowledge to another; from understanding to intuition; from individual to collective. Joy is the energy that produces the collective society (O'Sullivan, 2012: 27) and the surplus that is produced in ritual is a 'larval subject' that is then reintegrated into a particular societal position or role. The other purpose of liminal rites is to provide a state of effervescent *communitas* that 're-sets' relations for the cult itself. This appears to me, on a local level, to be the same mechanism by which capitalism and the state are able to tolerate a certain level of revolt by simply making adjustments for new social positions to be taken up. The challenge then is to attempt to maintain liminal and larval states indefinitely and resist being recuperated. History shows us that political structures are only ever metastable, so ruptures and restructuring can occur. Prolonged periods of liminality or cycles of liminality bring about this restructuring and it seems clear to me that the recent banking crash and the so called war on terror since 9/11 is one such period of liminality, but with extremely negative consequences for all of us. The question becomes 'how do we instigate what we might call a positive phase of liminality?'

While most human actions are shaped by 'secret causes' deriving from the unconscious, individual self-control keeps them in check. The effect of these 'secret causes' is most apparent and most dangerous in crowds, when the collective influence of the hypnotised masses takes hold (Richman, 1995: 60) as in the

cases of riots, football crowds or fascist rallies. For Durkheim, the effervescence of collective ritual is 'evidence of their revolutionary potential' (Richman, 1995: 62) and in order to become a subject group, a subjugated group must become revolutionary at the unconscious level. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984) I would like to propose that liminality provides the space for this molecular revolution of the unconscious.

Molecular diagrams

In *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sense* (2004), Deleuze presents the concept of the 'diagram', which is a development of Bacon's own term 'graph'. The term is developed further in *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze and Guattari 1988) and *Foucault* in relation to social formations as 'abstract machines' or a kind of principle that conditions the formation (Deleuze 2006). An example given by Manuel DeLanda is that of the class 'vertebrate' as a diagram on which individual species improvise their various forms. For Guattari, the diagram describes the relation between, and interpenetration of, 'a non-discursive and a signifying virtual' (incorporeal universes, existential territories, interior) and 'a discursive and signifying actual' (enunciation, actual discursive components, exterior), with subjects being the relationship between these two (O'Sullivan 2008). Diagrams are 'intersocial and constantly evolving', so they do not represent social formations that are fixed but aim at producing 'a new kind of reality, a new model of truth', defining social systems that are in 'perpetual disequilibrium' (Deleuze, 2006:30-1).

The diagram of a liminal ritual describes heterogeneous spaces of loosely assembled 'partial objects' and particle signs that are connected together to make what Deleuze and Guattari might call a body without organs (BwO). The BwO, especially in *A Thousand Plateaus*, is a name for 'constructive and experimental practices that involve living against that stratum that binds us and constitutes us as human'. (O'Sullivan, 2012: 278 n25) As far as dominant regimes of signification are concerned, if you are not organized as an organism, you are depraved. If you are not signified and signifier, you are deviant. If you are not a single, nailed-down subject, you're a tramp.

Discussions of collaboration are usually built upon a series of identities: individuals, groups, projects and the world, which are all dealt with as discrete unities. But the concept of molecular collaboration seeks to deliberately 'molecularise' groups, projects, and even the world. Molar and molecular are two ways of considering the same phenomenon or situation with the molar being a 'macro' way of considering wholes, structures, and systems of organisation, while the molecular is a 'micro' way of considering changes, particle flows, and the way that elements and forces interact to produce effects (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984, p. 279-281). Molecularity is primarily concerned with deterritorialising flows and movements that cross thresholds other than the edges traced by the molar segments. The molecular fluxes slip between the more rigid structures of our lives. (Deleuze and Parnet, 1987, p 125). The function of each co-participant within a molecular collaboration is not fixed in the same way as it might be considered within more molar conceptions of collaboration, but is in a state of flux and enters into

temporary alliance with other parts of the group, and other collaborative groups such that each co-participant has different capacities actualised in each different group.

The material, concrete actuality of a collective can mutate, develop and evolve up to the point where either internal differences effect the group's breaking up, a catastrophe occurs, or there is some other radical loss of cohesion. However, the *diagram* of collectivity includes all of the possible permutations that fit within the notion of collectivity as a type of social distribution of power and the diagram is also subsumed *within* actual instances of collectivity (Guattari, 1995: 45). The concept of the diagram is a tool for indexing the programme, or plan, that concrete assemblages follow, but also produce.

Heterogeneous assemblages

The term 'Assemblage' provides an instructive tool for analysing participation and collaboration. Assemblages are 'wholes whose properties emerge from the interactions between parts' (DeLanda 2006: 5). The theory addresses the relationship between parts and whole in a way that avoids 'organismic metaphors' and specifically in response to certain functionalist views of society as a unified system of mutually sustaining parts (DeLanda, 2006: 9). Assemblage theory does not refer to a specific type of social formation, but is meant to be a theory for all social formation and is a kind of molecular consideration of relations. The properties of a whole cannot be reduced to the properties of its component parts since the various capacities of the parts that will interact involve 'reference to the properties of other interacting entities' (DeLanda, 2006: 11). Assemblages are composed along two axes: the first is that of material or expressive *components* or *roles* that people can play in various degrees. Expressive components include content of talk, body language, dress, demeanor, choice of topic, an expression of group solidarity such as vows, mutual aid, or conformity. Material components of social assemblages include human bodies, food, labour, tools, machines, buildings and physical locations. The other axis is *processes* that stabilize or destabilize the identity of the social assemblage (DeLanda, 2006: 12). This is a crucial axis when considering revolutionary praxis. A process of deterritorialization is one that undoes or destabilizes spatial boundaries or increases internal heterogeneity/differentiation. A process of territorialization does not necessarily refer to a physical territory such as a workplace or church. It can also refer to processes that serve to make a group cohere, even when not physically inhabiting the same location, such as the payment of union dues or a membership/enrolment process. In the case of Bakunin's brotherhood, this would be a set of anarcho-socialist ideas as a conscious territorializing principle, but not everything that makes a social assemblage cohere or break up is operating at a conscious level.

Pierre Bourdieu develops the concept of the habitus to account for the hidden cognitive processes that condition people's orientation within a social structure or to the world in general (Bourdieu, 1977/2003: 440). The habitus is the result of personal and historical territorializing forces that create a particular

disposition to behave in certain ways. How the habitus manifests in a current social structure is a conjunction of previous and current conditions. What occurs is a practice that is an expression of structural conditions and the historically conditioned dispositions of the individual. The habitus is an unconscious process that produces 'objective intentions' in an individual of which they are not aware (Bourdieu, 1977/2003: 440). The 'orchestration of habitus' has the effect of harmonizing the behaviours of various 'agents' and their production such that their practices and works become 'immediately intelligible and foreseeable, hence taken for granted' and in this way people tend to *naturally* fall into social groups without making a conscious choice (Bourdieu, 1977/2003: 441). Habitus has a homogenizing effect (increasing cohesion and stability) on groups and classes caused by societal processes of repetition and accumulation. It is the unconscious, mutual adjustment of situations without any explicit coordination. The implication of this is that lasting social change can happen only as a result of lengthy re-habituating or any revolutionary change will tend to fall back into the same dispositions (Bourdieu, 1977/2003: 441). The concept of the habitus suggests that Bataille and Caillois' secret society could not radically transform social relations in any permanent way.

The functioning of a group requires a concordance of habitus between the members that does not fully condition the actions of members, but creates a ground from which they improvise (Bourdieu, 1977/2003: 441). The habitus is not a fully determined disposition but probabilistically determined because it is likely that all people from the same class will be confronted by similar series of influences (Bourdieu, 1977/2003: 446)... for Bourdieu, personal style must always refer back to the 'common' style of the group. Difference is always measured in terms of difference from the norm for that habitus (Bourdieu, 1977/2003: 446).

What we are calling the subject group actively expresses its equality by taking up a position other than prescribed by what Jacques Rancière calls the police order, this expression of equality that dissents from the established, dominant order is what Rancière refers to as politics. When people begin to express their equality within a social assemblage, not necessarily verbally, the assemblage can respond in two ways: either through increasing domination/exploitation to maintain the established social space (territorialization) or through developing into a new social space (deterritorialization). This process is a kind of deliberate-slippage glitch in which the collective desire of a new subject group transforms the social space. Another type of operation can occur that acts first on the territorial axis. If a sudden, unexpected, glitch occurs that immediately destabilizes the space of the project, such as a technical problem or a moment of panic that ruptures the flow of the social, a collective response to save the assemblage may occur. In these instances, there is a spontaneous change in the expressive components of the assemblage. I propose the latter of these two strategies is the most likely to result in expressions of equality. The formation of a politics or subject group arises from a desire to express equality. It is implied by Bakunin's account of the international brotherhood that it is not desirable to *make* people glitch a social assemblage because then there is definitely no chance of equality resulting:

hierarchy is maintained by the revolutionary party. Co-participants in social change must *choose* to grasp the opportunity to glitch or destabilize the social space, which requires us to risk the entire project 'failing' and to engage in two things that run counter to the police order: trust and sharing.

As people make adjustments to the group and their roles within it, the process is never completed. It is a stuttering process in which people come together, see their behaviour reflected back at them, move off in a new direction, come together, and so on, leading to a series of dead ends, false starts, antagonisms, resignations, and spirals. The focus for study of participatory society needs to shift towards specific cases; this particular set of relations, this particular participant, this particular building, etc. allowing for convivial and antagonistic relations simultaneously as they are presented in a molecular network.

Schizoanalysis

Schizoanalysis is a practice developed by Deleuze and Guattari for the analysis of social groups and organizations as a response to the analysis of the private client in the shrink's office and the pervasive influence on capitalism of psychoanalysis. It should be noted that for Deleuze and Guattari, there is essentially no such thing as an individual subject, since subjects are socially produced: they are always already collective. Guattari suggests that private ownership of the means of production is concerned with 'making desire the property of the self, the family and the social order' by blocking every approach to desire with 'familialist castration and the traps of consumerism'. This is the mechanism by which capital takes possession of our labour power: by separating desire from work and isolating it as property of an individual. (Guattari, 1984: 254) 'For capitalism [psychoanalysis] works as a substitute religion', which isolates individuals and reduces the chances of a person becoming involved in any social struggle. (Guattari, 1984: 257) The main task of schizoanalysis is to reconnect collective desire with production by putting together what Guattari refers to as desiring-machines, that is collective assemblages of enunciation: subject groups.

A key notion in schizoanalysis is that of the super-ego and the question of whether it arises from the social structure, handed down via the family, so that people come to desire their own repression as familiar, and pass it on to their own children. On the other hand, is it simply a psychic apparatus whose function is to balance the ego to adapt to reality? Therefore, 'either one's desire comes to desire repression and becomes its collaborator - and thus gains a status, neurotic or agonized maybe, but still a status! - or it revolts against the established order, and comes then under siege on all sides.' (Guattari, 1984: 256)

Revisiting Bourdieu's habitus for a moment, much of the operation of social formations takes place at an unconscious level and, for Guattari, the unconscious is itself 'above all a social *agencement*

(assemblage), the collective force of latent utterances.’ (Guattari, 1984: 257). The unconscious does not recognize private ownership of utterances or desire, so that ideas, influences and suggestions are in a state of flux across the collective at an unconscious level. Ultimately, the separation of social production from desiring-production is the target of schizoanalysis and ‘must be a target of the revolutionary struggle wherever familialist repression works against women, children, drug-addicts, alcoholics, homosexuals or any other disadvantaged group.’ (Guattari, 1984: 258) What matters in schizoanalysis is ‘not to reduce everything to a logical skeleton, but to enrich it, to let one link lead to the next, to follow real trails, social implications.’ (Guattari, 1984: 259)

Projects on a small scale such as ‘communities, neighbourhood committees, setting up creches in university departments, etc. - can play a crucial role.’ These may seem like insignificant projects for a revolutionary movement, but the experiences of past revolutions have shown that it is essential to transform the social assemblage from the bottom up and these projects can go a long way towards getting people accustomed to new, decentred social formations. Even if these projects do not ultimately lead to an international revolution against capital, as Guattari writes, ‘better ten successive failures or insignificant achievements than a gormless passivity in face of processes of co-option and the bureaucratic manipulation of professional militants.’ (Guattari, 1984: 261) That molecular forces can have macro molar effects is perhaps most memorably demonstrated by the snap decision of Stasi officer Harald Jäger during a demonstration by 20,000 East Berliners. The collective desire of the crowd prompted the opening of the gates that led to the wall being pulled down, which built up momentum that led to the eventual reunification of Germany.

Such local and autonomous social assemblages as the London-based School of the Damned and the New Cross Commoners offer alternative models for social organization and education that definitely bear closer examination. They offer diagrams for social praxis that other groups can pick up and improvise upon to meet their own local needs, and if these groups connect up to form a network of associations, all the better.

Conclusion

My conclusion, which is not really an ending, is that a bloody insurrectionist uprising is never going to be an adequate response to the state form or to late capitalism. What is needed instead is to undo the work of capitalism at the level of collective subjectivity and to reconnect desire with production. The resulting collective desiring machines, in the form of local associations of friends will then be free to form alliances with other collectives to share forms of praxis.

This may all sound optimistic and naïve but these forms of bottom up social organization already exist and function as alternate forms of economy inside and beneath capitalism and separate from the state form in nationless forms of social organization. Some that spring to mind are: Alcoholics Anonymous,

Wikipedia, Linux and other forms of improvised open source social assemblage. These and other forms of heterogeneous assemblage prepare people for decentered forms of self organization and are even now restructuring the unconscious ordering of the habitus. A revolution needs to be complete and at all levels of society in order to avoid the reaction. By 'all levels' I mean personal, group and society. Heterogeneous assemblages get people comfortable with open ended process and the idea of a diagram that is collectively improvised upon.

One person's collectively produced subjectivity, which is already multiple, finds that it can connect with another, and it wants to, it brings joy, like a neurotransmitter and its receptor connecting. This forms a new desiring machine, a collective assemblage of enunciation. These people can really relate to each other. This assemblage encounters other collective assemblages and they click, or they don't, but they want to. This joyful desiring production opens onto new forms of knowledge, what Spinoza calls the third kind of knowledge. The diagrams from which we improvise a secret society, a cult, a workers council, an anarchist local, whatever, is produced anew through the improvisational process. The truly revolutionary society is in a constant immanent condition of improvisation.

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