

Performing from Heidegger's *Turning*

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1. Introduction

The article gives brief outlines of two components. 1) A description of the performance philosophy of a site-specific ecological performance group, The Environmental Performance Authority (EPA) as expressed in a series of performances entitled *Coastal Scales*, developed in conjunction with the Hobsons Bay Council in Melbourne, Australia. 2) An outline for a philosophical basis of an understanding of the putative efficacy of that performance in the later work of Martin Heidegger, with particular reference to his concepts of the “turning”, and the occurrence of truth as the strife between earth and world, as developed in *Contributions to Philosophy* (1999; 2012) and “The Origin of the Work of Art” (1977). The article outlines the performance process and proposes a frame for its devising, assessment and measure through an understanding of Heidegger's concepts as an eco-phenomenological performance ethos.

The EPA centres around a group of performers, schooled in the practice of Bodyweather, as conceived by Butoh dancer Min Tanaka. Tanaka famously pronounced, “When I dance I don't dance in the place but I am the place” (quoted in Viala and Masson-Sékiné 1988: 75). Tanaka's claim is at the core of this project and the philosophy which underlies it. However, if it is not to be heard as a dubious homology, the claim needs to be examined in its methodological rigour and explained in the context of the ontological upending it implies.

However, before discussing the methodological processes and the philosophical implications and repercussions of the thinking underlying Tanaka's statement, I will describe the project, the process and the place as and in which the work is grounded.

2. The Project—*Coastal Scales*

Coastal Scales is a collaboration between The EPA, Hobsons Bay City Council, geographers, environmental scientists, indigenous scholars and custodians, cultural historians and community groups.

The project entails a series of mobile site-specific performances in an urban coastal environment of preserved saltmarshes and estuarine wetlands, industrial graveyards, abandoned colonial buildings, manicured parklands built on top of a rubbish dump landfill, and semi-reconstituted scrubland. The site has been chosen for the richness and vulnerability of its natural and built environments, its Indigenous history, its industrial history, and its mix of current uses—including an oil refinery, dog walking, heavy industry, sports, water management, botanical research in its pockets of fragile preserved ecologies, bird watching, and rubbish dumping.

There are 3 phases to the project:

- i. *Distal Fragments*: a series of immersive participatory mobile site-specific walking performances through marsh, scrub and parkland
- ii. *Explosive Measures*: a series of immersive site-specific performances and accompanying gallery installations in an abandoned explosives reserve and surrounding buildings
- iii. *Atmospheric Tides*: a 72 hour site-specific performance with walks, gallery installations, on-site training, and audience inhabitations.

These performances take place in the Truganina Swamp, Truganina Park, and Truganina Explosives Reserves, in the municipality of Hobsons Bay City Council, on Port Phillip Bay, approximately 10 km from the CBD of Melbourne, Australia. Hobsons Bay is a traditional industrial area, with a still functioning oil refinery, vast acreage of logistics and storage facilities, and large-scale manufacturing. There are substantial pockets of residential inhabitation, some, closer to the CBD, dating back to the mid 19th Century, but built mostly during and since the prosperity booms of the 1950s-1960s to house workers. With the exception of some high-end dwellings around the area of Altona Beach, it is traditionally a working and middle class area. The striking thing about the sites where the performances are taking place is that the industrial heritage has left large undeveloped tracts of what would otherwise be prime residential bayside land close to the heart of Melbourne, a city where investment in real estate is currently one of the most profitable businesses. Due to the industrial landscapes, the Truganina Swamp, Park and Explosives Reserve and surrounding coastlines have been partially preserved, allowing original estuarine environments, migratory bird nesting sites and delicate flora and fauna to flourish. The performances aim to work in and with these environments to allow them reveal their textures, rhythms, speeds, colours, temperatures, scales and intensities through providing an experience of them for audiences.

3. The Method—Giving-Over-To and Being-Moved-By

The performance methodology is an activation of an ecophenomenological ethics. The aim is not to produce a performance to be appreciated for its the aesthetic excellence or the skill of the performers, but to create immersive environments which draw attention to the place itself for audiences. It involves three components: 1) sustained inhabitations of the site, employing Bodyweather techniques to perform embodied analyses of the materiality of the place according to such measures as speed, weight, density, porosity, direction, colour, texture and other tangible physical qualities; 2) archival and oral histories of Indigenous and non-Indigenous inhabitation of the area, including consultation with Indigenous elders and “friends groups” to unearth the weave of stories that constitute the meanings of the place;¹ 3) qualitative investigation with local residents to map the emotional/affective experiences of the moods and atmospheres of the place.

The work also takes heed of, responds to and emerges from the ecology within the performance group itself and its close collaborations with researchers, and the goals of the local Council as expressed in its environmental/sustainability plan, its public space plan, and its arts and culture plan. This is a complex ethical situation which places multiple responsibilities on the group. There are multiple, often conflicting interests at play among the various organisations with which the EPA is working. It is often a delicate matter to balance the maintenance of a critical approach in working with such interests. Nevertheless, there is a general awareness in all parties of the need to respect and protect these environments for their own intrinsic value (however difficult this might be to assess), not only for their use value to the human inhabitants. The worth and measure of the performance is in its response to these circumstances. Consequently, as stated, the aim of the performance, not to draw attention to itself as an object of aesthetic or ethical excellence or virtue, but to reveal the textures and complexities of the place from which it emerges, remains the touchstone. Each performative intervention/moment seeks to create an experience of the place which engages audience members in the relations which constitute its specific ecologies. The ultimate guiding aim is to create an immersive experience sufficiently affecting to make a lasting impact on ongoing attitudes and behaviour towards these specific ecologies, and to questions of environment more generally.

The primary performative method of the EPA in the Hobsons Bay project is the “Dictionary of Atmospheres”, invented by Bodyweather performer and teacher Tess de Quincey (Grant 2013). In this method, dancers immerse themselves in an environment through a tripartite

method of “elements, attractors and atmospheres”. They move through a place until attracted by a specific object or arrangement of objects, or a feeling, or a material quality, or a dimension, or any other feature of the landscape which catches their attention with a degree of intensity which makes them stop and give further examination. They then spend time with the attractor, analysing the elements which constitute it: physical and sensible qualities such as weight, density, porosity, speed, permeability, direction, scale, smell, colour, moistness, texture. These elements or qualities are experienced intensively in concentration, as the components which constitute the material atmosphere of the place. The assumption is that the attraction is initially created because the attracted person was already available and disposed to the attunement to and by that particular atmosphere, and that an intensive dwelling will give the performer the opportunity to gain awareness of the specificities of their own attunement. The attraction is an expression of the performer’s trained sensitivity to the processes, sensations, rhythms and movements of their own body, and its availability to attunement with that particular atmosphere. This embodied awareness of the imbrication and congruence of the harmonics of place and body becomes the source material for the performance. Each performer works up three such atmospheres. These atmospheres are then combined with others from the group of performers working in the same place, and compiled as the Dictionary of Atmospheres of that place.

The ability to “give-over-to” the place is key to this method. The stated EPA priority of creating performances which aim to highlight the place itself rather than the aesthetic appreciation of the performers, is instantiated methodologically by the way in which the body of the performer is trained to be available to “be-moved-by” the place. The Bodyweather method offers a number of exercises which aim at giving-over-to and being-moved-by—literally, metaphorically and imaginatively. For example, in one such exercise “bag-of-bones”, members of the group take turns in allowing their own relaxed, limp body to be manipulated and moved by a group of three to five of the other performers who use their own bodies to position, fold, carry and shape the body of the person being moved. The exercise ends with a short improvisation in which the moved person recreates the sensation of the movements given to them by the other members. It is important to note that the aim is not to mimic or reproduce the movements but to recreate the sensory experience of being-moved. Other exercises in being-moved-by are based on establishing relationships between the place and the body through such exercises as imagined strings attached to various parts of the body and points in the place, and allowing the movements in the environment to determine the

movements of the body. Again, the aim is not a direct mimicry, but the establishment of a relationship, imaginary or perceptual, which allows the body to be moved by external forces. Performers also use imaginal techniques such as “I am up to my ankles/knees/thighs/waist in honey”, or “I am inhabiting the space between grains of sand”, or “my body is a swarm of dots”. Bag-of-bones and these other exercises are all givings-over-to perceived external or imaginary forces and forms, which aim at sensitizing and softening the body, preparing it to be susceptible to being-moved-by the environment. The body, thus prepared, is taken into immersion in the nuances of the texture and qualities of the environment, to register slight variations in air temperature and pressure, wind direction, speeds of vibration and movement, porosity and permeability, intensities of colour and form, and weights and rhythms of the elements which constitute the atmospheres of the place—dark and heavy, light, happy, uplifting, menacing, disturbing, welcoming, expansive, claustrophobic.

In this way the ecological ethic is directly and profoundly enacted in the practice. The ethical decision to giving-over-to the priority of the place is a responsible radical passivity, which lets the place take precedence over the human body; and the body, rather than a site of agency, becomes a site of response where its own surfaces, weights, textures and resistances become sites of a sensitive, receptive and responsive allowance to the surfaces, weights, textures and resistances of the place.

It should be noted that the technique becomes more effective the more it moves away from a simple mimetic representation of the place toward an intensive embodiment of the qualities of the place through the body as surface of registration for the resistances offered by the place. One aspect of the work is an ongoing analysis of the different levels of mimesis, from direct imitation of the movements of some aspect of the environment, to complete eschewal of direct mimesis and the move towards more explicit processes of being-moved-by internal responses to exterior perceptual stimuli. Most importantly, the work is an investigation of the question of how the techniques of being-moved-by and giving-over-to work for the audience. What immersive and participatory experiences and activities should be offered to the audience to break down the distanced, representational, theatrical stance of the spectator in order to let them into the place in a more profound manner? Is it possible that work devised through more mimetic performance techniques holds the audience at a distance from the performance in spectatorial mode, and positions them in a manner which inhibits an in-depth experience of the place. The group needs to analyse how the level of mimesis in the devising of the work relates to the audience capacity to become immersed in the place.

In the remainder of this article, I will give a brief overview of some key ideas in Heidegger's later work as a way of providing a theoretical underpinning for such investigations into letting both performer and audience enter the showing of the place. I will argue that Heidegger's approach in the *Contributions to Philosophy* (1999; 2012) constitutes a performative mode of entry into Being. I will contend that the deep immersive giving-over-to of Bodyweather can be understood as a living enactment of a structure of relationship which Heidegger proposes as a radical refiguring of human insertion in and emergence from earth and world. I will show how the practice offers a concrete, performative means which opens a possibility of the escape which Heidegger sought from representational metaphysics. More explicitly, I will suggest that the embodied method of giving-over-to and being-moved-by attractors, elements and atmospheres constitutes a practical living inception of Heidegger's concept of "the turning", and thus allows the entry into the "fundamental occurrence" of Being, which is necessary to overcome the devastating, calculating enframing of representational metaphysics which he sought.

4. The Turning

Heidegger's contribution to the phenomenological tradition is the introduction of a non-aprioristic hermeneutics. The fundamental thought of hermeneutics is the hermeneutic circle, first introduced by Schleiermacher in his insight into the co-constitution of self and language:

An act of speaking cannot even be understood as a moment in a person's development unless it is also understood in relation to the language. This is because the linguistic heritage modifies our mind.

Nor can an act of speaking be understood as a modification of the language unless it is also understood as a moment in the development of the person (later addition: because an individual is able to influence a language by speaking, which is how a language develops). (1985: 75)

Heidegger's work can be read in one sense as an ever more fundamental radicalisation of this structure of mutual codetermination, reaching its most complete expression in his idea of "the turning" (2012: 246-47). The key theme in this aspect of Heidegger's work is the attempt to escape oppositions—between beings and Being, world and earth, human and world, truth as correspondence and correctness, and the intentional relation between perceiver and perceived. Heidegger refigures all of these apparent oppositions as mutually co-requiring

relationships. The turning is a refiguring of the question of the relationship of the human to its environments. In the turning, the human is considered as an emergence of the environment it inhabits. The things of the world are not conceived as “out there”, as objects held over against I the subject, but are involved in belonging with me in a co-immersion. Rather than a subject which has others, human and non-human, as objects, represented in systems, the turning frames the human as situated in and determined by its others in a mutually creative “oscillation” or “counter-resonance” which brings forth both as emergences of the same process—a process Heidegger calls *Beyng* (*Seyn*) (1999: 169, 180, 182, 2012: 189, 200, 203). *Beyng* is not a quality which beings possess, as in the beingness of beings, but the process which occurs when the interpretive thrown-projection of human Dasein opens the worlds to which it belongs and without which it could not exist. Human Dasein and Being require each other in a mutual belonging. The human is no longer the representing spectator of the world arrayed before it, but is intrinsically implicated in it. The human is responsible for the unconcealing disclosure of the world, for bringing it to light. The things of the world are unconcealed as what they are by the human engagement with them.

For Heidegger, this disclosure is the site of truth. The everyday contemporary idea of truth as correctness and correspondence is a late historical development which diverges from a more fundamental idea of truth as the uncovering-bringing-forth of what is. Heidegger retrieves this sense of truth from the Greek idea of *aletheia*, unforgetting. Truth is the process by which the unconcealment of what is fundamentally occurs (2012: 259-292). In “The Origin of the Work of Art” Heidegger describes this fundamental occurrence of the coming forth of truth as the “strife between earth and world” (1977: 174). The strife between earth and world is an exemplary instance of this mutual co-belonging.

World and earth are essentially different from one another and yet are never separated. The world grounds itself on the earth and earth juts through world. Yet the relationship between world and earth does not wither away into the empty unity of opposites unconcerned with one another. The world, in resting upon the earth, strives to surmount it. As self-opening it cannot endure anything closed. The earth, however, as sheltering and concealing, tends always to draw the world into itself and keep it there. (174)

So earth and world, like Dasein and Being, require each other. “The earth cannot dispense with the open region of the world...the world in turn cannot soar out of the earth’s sight” (174). The world “sets itself up” on earth, and the earth “juts through” the world (175). This

strife of earth and world is the occurrence of the movement of clearing and concealing which Heidegger calls truth as unconcealment. One key site where this happens is the work of art.²

Truth establishes itself in the work. Truth essentially occurs only as the strife between clearing and concealing in the opposition of world and earth. Truth wills to be established in the work as this strife of world and earth. (187)

In Heideggerian terms, the performance methodology of the EPA very literally enjoins the strife between earth and world. It sets up a clearing and in so doing allows earth to be unconcealed in its concealedness. The performers work with the sheltered concealment of earth, never fully understanding and encompassing it, but nevertheless aim to set up worlds as hermeneutic clearings, interpretations which others can experience. However, ultimately, in the experience of those worlds, the audience members are confronted with the impenetrability of earth as it juts through those worlds. Earth is never revealed naked and indiscreet but only shows-forth shrouded in and as its mystery and hiddenness, “the gravity of stone, the mute hardness of wood, the dark glow of colors” (187). All the performance can do is set up hermeneutic worlds in which performers and audience reserve and preserve the shelteredness of earth. There is no all-revealing mastery, but rather an invitation to enjoin the strife.

So, in and from the immersion of the turning, the giving-over-to and the being-moved-by, the performers make the decisions through which worlds are set up and the concealedness of earth juts forth. The performance methodology aims to enact the oscillating counter-resonance of the performers and the place. This fundamentally occurs as the setting up of a world. The world of the performance offers no comprehension of the earth but becomes its vehicle. The performative entry into the turning, becomes the site where truth *occurs* as the counter-resonance or oscillation of the strife of earth and world. The performance is a place where truth as unconcealing *happens*. As performative, the performance is not *about* the place, in the same way that Heidegger’s writings in the *Contributions* are not *about* anything, but are “sayings” which bring forth that which they say (1999: 4). As performative, the performance enacts the place, is *of* the place, emerges *from* the place, as the in-stance-ing instauration of the place, the setting up of a world. The performance strives towards the non-mimetic, the non-narrative, through the being-moved-by, and carries the being-moved-by into the audience to allow them to be-moved-by the performance into the place.

In this Heideggerian sense, the Dictionary of Atmospheres constitutes a projecting-open of a world which opens a way into the place for the audience. It does not tell stories, does not imitate the place, but opens it as the place that it is through allowing it to emerge as truth in the oscillating counter-resonance of the strife of earth and world. There is certainly a great deal of prior research that goes into the performance, into the Indigenous and non-Indigenous stories and histories, the knowledge of the flora and fauna, the migratory birds, the geology, and some of it finds its way into the performance as content. But primarily the role of the research is to sensitize the performers to the nuances and subtleties of the qualities of the place, to soften them so that the thrown-projecting-open of the being-moved-by and the giving-over-to: to the winds, the temperatures, the forms, the textures, the smells, can allow the bodies of the performers to be the carriers of the resonances of the place and to carry-forth those resonances as counter-resonances opened for the audience to attune to the worlds which the Dictionary of Atmospheres sets up for the sheltering of the earth to emerge in its hiddenness.

5. Reservedness

In discussions during and after the performance, both audience members and performers commented on how aspects of the work which caught the slowness and stillness of the place, movements which harmonized with the intrinsic rhythms, were more affecting than faster, more overtly danced impositions. Also, the more the movements directly resembled the movements of the place and the things in it, the river, the trees etc, the more theatrical and representational it became, the more it set the audience up in an enframed spectatorial mode, and the less it felt as though it was opening up the place for the audience. Audiences felt drawn into the place by slower stiller movements with more subtle gesture. Movements which sought to recreate sensations which occurred as a result of the encounter with the place were more affecting for the audience than more mimetic representational movements. The giving-over-to the place created a greater sense of belonging in a mode of listening to the place. The listening bodies of the performers drew the audiences into the rhythms and attitudes and orientations of the listening. In discussions at the end, audiences felt that the aim of the performance to draw attention to the place itself had been achieved. The performers became an attracting part of the texture of the place.

Performers and audience agreed that it is in the reservedness, the stillness, the silence, the listening, the slowness, the holding-back, that the performance allows the place to show itself as it is. The overt performance of the stillness and silence invites the audience into the fundamental attunement of reservedness, allowing them to use the performance to enter into the place in a way to which normal everyday modes, strolling, walking the dog, thinking of the affairs of the daily business, even in a most relaxed mode, cannot attain.

The attunement of reservedness or restraint (*Verhaltenheit*),³ in its stillness and silence, is central to Heidegger's preparation for the performative leap into the "inceptual" thinking which might escape representative metaphysics (2012: 51). Reservedness, silence, and stillness are all intimately tied up with the truth of the disclosure of world and the concealedness of earth.

Thus the deep stillness must first come over the world for the earth. This stillness only springs forth from reticence (keeping silent)⁴. And this reticence (bringing into silence) only grows only out of reservedness. As grounding attunement, reservedness thoroughly tunes the intimacy of the strife between world and earth and thus the strifing of the onset of enownment. (Heidegger 1999: 25)

Moreover, "reservedness is the ground of care...reservedness of *Da-sein* first of all grounds care as the inabiding that sustains the t/here [Da]" (25). This suggests that reservedness and restraint are also necessary conditions of the coming-forth of place as it occurs in the projecting-open. In the *Contributions*, the concept of Dasein developed in *Being and Time*, as a kind of essence of human being, undergoes a transformation to become the action of the opening of "time-space", the condition of possibility of time and space (2012: 299). This time-space occurs through the thrown-projecting-open of human understanding, (again developed further from *Being and Time*), but sustains into an emergence into a t/here through the staying-with of inabiding care. But this inabiding care requires reservedness as its ground. So it would seem that a performance sufficient to allow the place itself to emerge must be grounded in restraint and reservedness.

6. Final Note

Clearly, there is much to be unravelled here. This article is necessarily written in dense Heideggerian language rife with neologisms, translations, retranslations, unconventional usages and philologically derived redefinitions. Heideggerian terms such as care, strife,

projecting-open, earth, world, truth and many others require thorough introductory definition for the reader of performance studies. To cite a random example, the word *Verhaltenheit* contains echoes of holding, withholding, holding open, stopping, and staying. Daniela Vallega-Neu, writes of, “a staying with speechlessness, a staying turned toward the occurrence of being ...attuned by reservedness...listening to being’s compelling call...that Heidegger will rethink in his later works as *das Gelaut der Stille* (“the gathered sounding of silence”) (2001: 74).

The necessity of this renovation of language is crucial to Heidegger’s project. He is seeking a way out of Western metaphysics to establish a completely new relationship with Being and consequently with the ways in which humans manifest the world for themselves. On account of his principle that language is the way the relationship with the world is revealed, a new language is required to unconceal the world anew. Accordingly, in the *Contributions*, Heidegger embarks on a series of performative writing experiments to attempt a “leap” at a new thinking. The *Contributions* proposes a performative solution to the problem of metaphysics, decided precisely because it escapes existent language, and listens to find the new language appropriate to its coming-forth and realisation.

In the case of the EPA performance methodology described here, it needs to be stressed that Heidegger’s thinking is not a blunt, after-the-fact, analogizing interpretation of the work, looking to find parallels, but a concrete starting point, a formative inspiration for the development of the method. Heidegger’s performative new thinking provides an example of fundamental principles and approaches which might animate a performance methodology by which a new relation between the earth and the human might be ventured.

The performance work, although derived from a specific tradition of Butoh and Bodyweather, is a direct application of Heidegger’s thinking. It is so because the thinking of the turning, as an attempt at an entirely new conceptualisation of the relationship between humans and their worlds, offers a way to an ecophenomenological performance, based in such a relationship. This mode of performance, in its aim to show the place rather than the performers, is an embodied instantiation of a thinking in which the human is no longer the star of the show, but catches attention, stands aside and draws the audience into a dwelling with the place.

Again, a full explanation of this line of thinking would require a thorough going-over of the Heideggerian conceptual framework on which it rests. This undertaking, in the form of the

ongoing study of the *Contributions*, has been gaining momentum and excitement since the publication of these writings in 1989.⁵

Finally, the ultimate justification which unites both Heidegger's performative writings and the work of the EPA is a sense of the emergency which necessitates this work.

Heidegger:

Therein is decided the future of humans. They may for centuries still ravish and devastate the planet with their machinations, and the monstrousness of this drive may "develop" to an inconceivable extent, assume the form of an apparent strictness, and become the measuring regulation of the devastated as such; the greatness of being will remain closed off, since decisions about truth and untruth no longer arise. All that matters is the calculation of the success and failure of the machinations. This calculation extends into a presumed "eternity", which is not such but is only the endless "and so on" of what is most desolate and most fleeting. (2012: 324)

The stakes are high: the future of humanity, the future of the earth, the future of science, and the relationship with the divine. In the face of such high stakes, this short article on a still-forming, evanescent relationship between some philosophical concepts and a site-specific performance technique, can only hint or point towards a beginning recognition of the potential that this period of Heidegger's work has for devising a proposed mode of site-specific ecological performance which aims to create the possibility of a new kind of thinking and acting based in a relation of giving-over-to being-moved-by the environment.

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¹ Much of the work of preservation of ecosystems, and historical sites is maintained by volunteer “friends groups” sponsored by the local Council. The Truganina Explosive Reserve Preservation Society, which was responsible for running the campaign which ensured that this historical industrial site was not redeveloped for residential purposes, is working very closely with the project, providing speakers as well as extensive archival material.

² Other such sites are the political state, the essential sacrifice, and the thinker’s questioning, :Heidegger, Martin. (1977). "The Origin of the Work of Art." In *Basic Writings: From Being and Time (1927) to The Task of Thinking (1964)*, 139-212. San Francisco: Harper pp. 186-187.

³ Emad and Maly translate *Verhaltenheit* as reservedness. Heidegger, Martin. (1999). *Contributions to Philosophy: (From Enowning)*. Translated by P Emad and K Maly. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. Rojcewicz and Vallega-Neu use restraint. Heidegger, Martin. (2012). *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*. Translated by Richard Rojcewicz and Daniela Vallega-Neu. Bloomington: Indiana University Press..

⁴ The parenthesized interpolations in this paragraph are from Rojcewicz and Vallega-Neu’s translation. The main body is Emad and Maly.

⁵ Some key works in this study are: Emad, Parvis. (2007). *On the Way to Heidegger's Contributions to Philosophy*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press; McNeill, William. (2006). *The Time of Life: Heidegger and Ethos*. Albany: State University of New York Press; Polt, Richard F. H. (2006). *The Emergency of Being: On Heidegger's Contributions to Philosophy*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press; Scott, Charles E. (2001). *Companion to Heidegger's Contributions to Philosophy*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press; Vallega-

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