

PART **I**

**Foundational
Concepts:
Affirmed and
Contested**

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CHAPTER 1

Spatialities: The Rebirth of Urban Anthropology through Studies of Urban Space

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter addresses the death and rebirth of urban anthropology in the 1990s and 2000s through the addition of spatial theories drawn from geography and a fuller understanding of the political economy of place. This transition, often referred to as the “spatial turn” or in this volume “spatialities,” is discussed by tracing the methodology, history, and substance of urban anthropology with an emphasis on works that employed spatial theory and privileged the built environment. With its origins in traditional ethnography, urban anthropology initially focused on small groups of culturally distinct people living in urban enclaves, leaving the study of urban space to geographers, sociologists, and urban planning. However, during the 1980s a transition occurred, the so-called “death and rebirth of urban anthropology” based on linking macro and micro analyses of urban processes through re-thinking the city as a space of flows (see Chapter 2, “Flows”), that is, circuits of labor, capital, goods, and services moving ever more rapidly through space, time, and the internet; and a space of places, that is, the physical locations of social reproduction, recreation, and the home. This discussion reviews both the components of the spatialities approach and highlights how this important change in theory and method occurred within urban anthropology.

Briefly, the death of urban anthropology was occasioned by a rejection of traditional ethnography strategies as inadequate for dealing with the complexities of modern cities. The so-called rebirth was then stimulated by theoretical work on urban systems, labor flows, and social networks by Anthony Leeds (1973), the incorporation of political economic approaches drawn from geography, sociology, and political science (Mullings 1987; Susser 1982), and the emergence of the anthropology of space and place that examined the city as a material and spatial as well as cultural form (Low 1999; Pellow 1996; Rotenberg and McDonogh 1993). Theories of transnational and translocal anthropology, also emerging at that time, played a dominant role in conceptualization of the city as a nexus of local and global relationships (see Chapter 17, “Transnationality”).

METHODOLOGY

The most distinctive aspect of an anthropological approach to the study of the city is the centrality of ethnography and the production of urban ethnographies of groups of people in urban settings, called “anthropology in the city.” An ethnography is a methodology for describing, analyzing, and theorizing about a group of people from a sociocultural perspective as well as the written text of the results produced by this methodology. There has been lengthy discussion as to what constitutes an adequate ethnography, but for the purpose of this chapter, I refer to urban ethnography as the cultural anthropological study of cities, urban peoples, networks, systems, and environments. Ethnographies are generally characterized by participant observation, a qualitative method that relies on the anthropologist as a recorder and interpreter living among the people studied within their cultural setting, and the process by which he/she learns about local social, political, and economic life. Most ethnographers, however, use a wide range of methods, including quantitative surveys and maps as well as qualitative interviews, life histories, and personal documents. An urban ethnography offers an intimate glimpse of city life through the eyes of its residents as seen and understood by the anthropologist. It differs from other methodologies because of its emphasis on what has been called “thick description” and narrative explanation of the rich details of everyday social life.

Yet the death of urban anthropology occurred because of a widespread disenchantment with some aspects of small-scale urban ethnography and the anthropology in the city model. The critique was based on the inability of traditional ethnographic methods to conceptualize the city as a whole – as a system of symbols, process, networks, or relationships – that was necessary to understand rapid transformations in the global economy and urban landscape. Urban anthropologists retained the use of culture as a theoretical construct, but at the same time challenged its essentialized nature and deconstructed the concept to produce a more fluid and complex notion. At the same time, urban ethnography expanded to encompass historical, political, and economic as well as spatial analyses advocating an anthropology *of* the city, rather than *in* the city. The “urban,” then, became re-conceived of as a set of processes rather

than a setting, and its material and spatial form integrated into the study of social relationships.

While ethnography still plays an important role in defining an urban anthropological approach, it is more likely to be a “multi-sited” ethnography. Bestor’s (2001) study of tuna trade traces the circuits of fishing, marketing, trading, and consuming of tuna as it occurs throughout the world. The “ethnography” includes data collected at all of these sites, including a fishing village in Spain, the central Tokyo fish market, and a high-end sushi restaurant in New York City. He argues that to understand the tuna trade the flow of capital, labor, and commodities needs to be examined and researched. Low, Taplin, and Scheld (2005) argue in a similar vein that to produce an adequate park ethnography, a variety of sites, activities, parks, and neighborhoods must be considered. The point of multi-sited ethnography is that the phenomena studied should be tracked through its local and/or global landscape, following the actors and social processes involved without artificially capturing them within a predetermined location.

The production of urban space and the social construction of urban places and their contestation also have become central in anthropological, not just geographical, analyses. Space has become an analytic tool that complements traditional ethnography, particularly in studies of the consequences of architectural and urban planning projects and embodied analyses of the use of urban space. These spatial analyses require new techniques such as behavioral mapping, transect walks (journeys or tours with informants), physical traces mapping, movement maps, and population counts that complement traditional ethnographic participant observation and in-depth interviewing.

The overall strength of urban anthropology methodologies lies in their ability to provide empirical in-depth and embodied understandings of everyday life and individual practices inextricably embedded in and contingent to global socioeconomic and political forces. The link between social forces and global capital with local politics and practices is especially clear in studies that examine grassroots organizing in response to urban transformations, and power dynamics, both local and global, in a variety of community contexts. The linking of the macro political economic analysis with the micro ethnographic reality of individuals provides an integrated social science and humanistic perspective for urban design, planning and policy decisions, and a solid intellectual framework for future urban anthropological endeavors.

HISTORY AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The roots of traditional urban anthropology grew out of what has been called the rural–urban transition of peasant cultures when agriculturalists leaving rural villages encounter the city and adapt to urban life. This history continues to influence anthropologists who study migrants and migration, secondary cities, and transnational communities although now reconfigured as revolving circuits of migration and capital flow. Many urban ethnographers, however,

have struggled to free themselves from the confines of this rural to urban development model and focus on translocality as a way of understanding an urbanism where residents and migrants live simultaneously in multiple urban and rural worlds (Low forthcoming).

The theoretical trajectory of urban anthropology drew upon the work of the Chicago School in the 1920s and 1930s and the development of an urban ecological perspective. The city was theorized as made up of adjacent ecological niches occupied by human groups in a series of concentric rings surrounding the central core. Class, occupation, world view, and life experiences are coterminous with an inhabitant's location within this human ecology (see Chapter 9, "Class"). Social change was thought to occur through socioeconomic transitions of these areas in an ever downward spiral toward the inner city. Research strategies focused on participant observation as a method of uncovering and explaining the adaptations and accommodations of urban populations to these micro-environments.

Another major influence was a series of community studies undertaken as part of the Institute of Community Studies program of policy and planning research on the slum clearance and replacement of housing in London, England and Lagos, Nigeria. These studies, beginning in the 1950s, theorized the city as made up of a series of urban "communities," based on extended family relations and kinship networks (see Chapter 3, "Community"). Coincidentally, the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations published Bott's (1957) study of the social networks of middle-class English families that drew upon discussions with anthropologists at the University of Manchester. The methodological contribution of network analysis as the basis for studying the social organization of city residents was widely used to understand the rapidly urbanizing populations of Latin America, as well as by North American researchers interested in the interconnections and interdependencies of family and household relationships among the urban poor. Network studies have become more elaborate and quantitative, but still provide an important methodological strategy and paradigm for urban anthropological researchers.

Early studies of planned physical and social change in Latin American low-income residential neighborhoods, as well as studies of the planning and design of new towns such as Ciudad Guayana (Peattie 1972) provided further ethnographic examples of local conflict over national and international planning goals. These studies identified foreign capital investment and the power/knowledge of the technologies of planning and architecture (Rabinow 1989) as antithetical to producing a humane environment for local populations and workers (see Chapter 5, "Built Structures and Planning"). Studies of urban renewal and community rebuilding after natural disasters further contributed to understanding how the dynamics of redevelopment processes often exclude the needs and meanings of residents. These studies, although focused on the local, set the stage for later poststructuralist studies of urban struggle for land tenure rights and adequate housing, as well as for studies of planning and architecture as instruments of social control.

The cumulative theoretical writings of Anthony Leeds (1973) were the beginning of a major shift in theoretical focus and methodological complexity. Up until this point, urban ethnographies rarely articulated with national and global circuits of capital and labor. Leeds' work concentrated on supra-local and local linkages and the nation/state level of analysis; the majority of his fieldwork dealt with the city as the point of articulation of these complex relationships. Although he was not able to change the course of urban anthropology in his lifetime, his model of the flow of goods, cash, labor, and services between metropole and countryside provided the theoretical underpinnings of what would stimulate the rebirth of the field.

Another aspect of this transition also occurred in the 1980s, with Ida Susser's (1982) ethnography of a Brooklyn working-class neighborhood, and Leith Mullings' (1987) critique of the study of cities in the United States that ushered in a decade of critical studies of the structural forces that shape urban experience. The social organizational paradigm that dominated earlier studies was superseded by a political economy paradigm. These studies theorize the city by examining the social effects of industrial capitalism and deconstructing the confusion of urbanism with inequality and alienation.

THE SPATIAL TURN

The methodological and theoretical use of spatiality within anthropology began with ethnographies that examined the relationship of architecture and culture. The concepts of space and place emerged in urban ethnographies through the collective work of anthropologists who employed material space as a strategy for interrogating the city (Bestor 2004; Cooper 1994; Holston 1989; Low 1999, 2000; Pellow 1996; Rotenberg and McDonogh 1993). Their work was directly influenced by French social theorists who theorized space in terms of the power dynamics of spatial relations and the meaning of everyday places and practices.

For example, drawing upon Foucault (1977), Paul Rabinow (1989) was one of the first anthropologists to link the growth of modern forms of political power with the evolution of aesthetic theories, and to analyze how French colonists in North Africa exploited architectural and urban planning principles to reflect their cultural superiority. James Holston (1989) also examined the state-sponsored architecture and master planning of Brasilia as a new form of spatial domination through which daily life became the target for state intervention.

Lefebvre's (1991) well-known argument that space is never transparent, but must be queried through an analysis of spatial representations, spatial practices, and spaces of representation also became the basis of many anthropological analyses. Nancy Munn (1996), and Stuart Rockefeller (2010) draw upon Lefebvre to link conceptual space to the tangible by arguing that social space is both a field of action and a basis for action.

Other anthropological efforts started with Bourdieu (1977) and focused on how meaning and action interact in interdependent ways to inculcate and reinforce cultural knowledge and behavior. Bourdieu's theory of practice provides the point of departure for Henrietta Moore (1986) who concurs that space only acquires meaning when actors invoke it. She argues that spaces are subject to multiple interpretations, such that Endo men and women may share the same conceptual structure but enter into it in different positions and therefore subject it to different interpretations (Moore 1986: 163).

Margaret Rodman (1992) and Miles Richardson (1982), on the other hand, relied on Merleau-Ponty's theories of phenomenology and lived space to focus attention on how different actors construct, contest, and ground their personal experience. Alberto Corsín Jiménez (2003) goes even further and insists that "space is no longer a category of fixed and ontological attributes, but a becoming, an emergent property of social relationship. Put somewhat differently, social relationships are inherently spatial, and space an instrument and dimension of space's sociality" (2003: 140).

In my own ethnographic work, I initially proposed a dialogical process made up of the social production of space and the social construction of space to explain how culture is spatialized. In this analysis, the social production of space includes all those factors – social, economic, ideological, and technological – that result, or seek to result, in the physical creation of the material setting. The materialist emphasis of the term social production was useful in defining the historical emergence and political economic formation of urban space. The term social construction was reserved for the phenomenological and symbolic experience of space as mediated by social processes such as exchange, conflict, and control. Thus, the social construction of space is the social, psychological, and functional transformation of space – through peoples' social exchanges, memories, images, and daily use of the material setting – into scenes and actions that convey symbolic meaning. Both processes are social in the sense that both the production and the construction of space are mediated by social processes, especially being contested and fought over for economic and ideological reasons. Understanding them can help us see how local conflicts over space can be used to uncover and illuminate larger issues (Low 2000).

Unfortunately this co-production model was limited by its two-dimensional structure. It did not consider two other important spatial dimensions, that of the body and group – the embodied spaces of the self/person/family in the Western intellectual tradition, and the transnational and translocal spaces of the modern world and global economy. Further, the co-production model did not address how language and discourse influence the meaning and politics of the built environment. To develop a more powerful notion of spatializing culture it became necessary to incorporate these additional understandings of spatial practices and meanings.

Adding embodied space to the social construction and social production of space solves much of this problem. The person as a mobile spatial field – a spatiotemporal unit with feelings, thoughts, preferences, and intentions as well as out-of-awareness cultural beliefs and practices – creates space as a poten-

tiality for social relations, giving it meaning, form, and, ultimately through the patterning of everyday movements, produces place and landscape. The social construction of space is accorded material expression as a person/spatiotemporal unit, while social production is understood as both the practices of the person/spatiotemporal unit and global and collective forces. Further, the addition of language and discourse theories expand the conceptualization of spatializing culture by examining how talk and media are deployed to transform the meaning of practices and spaces. For example, gated community residents' discourse of fear plays a critical role in sustaining the spatial preference for and cultural acceptance of walled and guarded developments (see Chapter 16, "Policing and Security"). The concept of spatializing culture employed in the reformulation of urban anthropology, thus, encompasses these multiple processes – social production, social construction, embodiment, and discursive practices – to develop an anthropological analysis of urban spatialities (Low forthcoming).

Contested Urban Space

Ethnographic approaches to urban space are an important strategy for studying contestation and resistance in the city. When the appropriation of land for urban redevelopment threatens to limit access to or exclude certain groups from using public spaces, these plans may be contested by local segments of the population whose identity is variously bound to the site. Matthew Cooper (1994) describes how the city of Toronto initially planned to create an urban "meeting place" on its waterfront where the culturally diverse vitality of the city could be realized, but was threatened by occupants of the development's office buildings, luxury condominiums, and upscale stores who quickly organized to exclude access to others. Timothy Sieber (1993) also argues that as working waterfronts have waned in the United States, bourgeois and professional classes have sought these spaces near the water as a recreational or leisure resource, to be consumed by viewing (see Chapter 22, "Nature"). Using design guidelines that promote visual consumption, the Boston waterfront can be experienced by taking walks, bicycling and dining with a view of the water, but excludes facilities favored by the working classes. This stream of research also draws upon theories of spectacle and the role of spectacle as it is vital to a city's accumulative capital.

Although liberal democracies ideally guarantee their citizens access to and unimpeded use of public spaces, contested forms of use are challenged and limited by the government and political elites through permits and police activity (see Chapter 26, "The Commons"). New York City's attempt to close down an African and African American street market became a war against the disorderly informal economy of ambulatory vendors and the failure to control street vending. Dar es Salaam has pitted working professionals against the urban poor in perpetual conflict. Suzanne Scheld (2003) suggests that it is through urban markets and the commodification of style and clothing remade into instruments of prestige and "fashion" that this contestation occurs on streets, schools, and sidewalks (see Chapters 7 and 13, "Markets" and "Extralegality").

Specific locations in which local conflicts play out are increasingly seen as involving something more than just neighborhood or civic issues; contested sites are often the stage upon which social memory is constructed (Sawalha 2010). The production and reproduction of hegemonic schemes require the monopolization of public spaces in order to dominate memories. Popular and official memories co-define each other, often in shifting relations, but the state controls public spaces critical to the reproduction of a dominant memory while marginalizing the counter-histories of peasants, women, working classes, and others (see Chapter 20, “Memory and Narrative”).

Some of these processes are seen most dramatically in urban sites located in the former Soviet Union which are just now reconstructing their urban landscapes and collective memories. In Warsaw, Poland, attempts to rename a street in honor of a local priest, an early Solidarity martyr, were considered too controversial by some residents who opposed the compromises the political movement had made with the Catholic Church that had become too powerful in dictating state social policies (Tucker 1998). In the Jewish Kazimierz district in Krakow, redevelopment plans sought to “restore” the past by erasing the Nazi occupation and 40 years of communism (Kugelmass and Bukowska 1998). Government-mandated street renaming in East Berlin after reunification also brought about objections by residents who rejected the state’s attempt to create a new vision of the German state. The state selectively eliminated names with historical references to local twentieth-century socialist figures, which were vaguely equated with the Third Reich, in favor of those representing the nineteenth-century Prussian state. Monuments in Moscow have become vehicles by which politicians project their own images onto the empty spaces of the state. Monuments and their mythical properties in post socialist contexts are producing a new form of political practice which anesthetizes and tranquilizes the public and serves to detract citizens from asking questions about political accountability while discouraging expectations for economic improvement.

Racialized Space

The processes of racialization have been studied primarily in US and South African cities, focused on different aspects of racism and racial segregation (see Chapter 12, “Race”). In the United States, the displacement of Blacks through redlining and other real estate activities, analyses of gentrification in African American neighborhoods, and studies of housing abandonment by the city and federal government provide ethnographic explanations of American residential apartheid. And the continued high level of residential segregation experienced by Blacks in American cities is a classic example of how racial prejudice and discriminatory real estate practices and mortgage structures insulate Whites from Blacks. Gregory (1998) notes that a shift from race-based to class-based politics is even separating the residences of low-income Blacks in Queens from middle-class Blacks who are increasingly adopting the political values of White homeowners. In South Africa, on the other hand, the emphasis has been on how housing and race segregation has changed the built environment as well

as the transportation system. The politics of the segregation have been subordinated to studies of gated communities and other forms of restricted class and racial access (see Chapter 9, “Class”).

As in the South African examples, racialization studies also examine fortified residential enclaves found in the cities where walls, surveillance technologies, and armed guards separate the upper and middle classes from the poor (Low 2003). These secured enclaves play a role in the spatial segregation and transformation of the quality of public life globally. Justified by increasing fear of violence and street crime, fortified enclaves have become status symbols and instruments of social separation dividing cities into areas of ostentatious wealth and extreme poverty.

Comparing gated communities in the United States, Latin America, and China, I found that the only common reason that residents used to explain their decision to move to a gated community, was fear of crime and others, regardless of the level of crime in the region or neighborhood (see Chapter 16, “Policing and Security”). I argue that fear is a reflection of the impact of globalization and increased heterogeneity on the local population. Unlike crime, heterogeneity is increasing in all three regions, although the kind of heterogeneity (racial, ethnic, class or urban/rural) is different in each. The fear of crime – common in local discussions by gated community residents – is a rationalization for another kind of conversation about the influx of new people who are different, who do not hold the same values, and behave in unpredictable, often unacceptable, ways. It does not matter whether the heterogeneity is about newcomers moving into a neighborhood, rural people coming to the city, or the urban poor moving to the suburbs, it has the same result. In many cases, especially in the United States and Latin America, this discussion also is encoded in the talk about nostalgia for the past, and finding a place one feels comfortable (see Chapter 20, “Memory and Narrative”). With the widening gap between rich and poor, everyone feels more insecure, and as status and class anxiety escalates, so does the desire for living in a homogeneous and socially predictable place, reinforcing the racialization and segregation of urban space.

Landscapes of Fear

Landscapes of fear have become a central focus in the spatialities research within urban anthropology, producing considerable debate about the nature of the fear and how it is produced. For example, Washington, DC’s and New York City’s emerging landscapes of fear are being produced by new defensive spatial designs, the erosion of public space through privatization and securitization, and memorials that constitute and reinforce affective responses to the built environment. Hoffman goes so far as to suggest that post-colonial African cities such as Freetown or Monrovia are organized according to a “logic of barracks” creating “spaces of the organization and deployment of violent labor” (2007: 422–423).

Anthropological studies of violence also examine the deeper substrate of the human psyche and behavior by examining the relationship between narratives,

violence, and urban places, where those narratives sustain and rationalize violence and terror. For example, Bourgois (1995) describes the fear and sense of vulnerability experienced by El Barrio residents and by anthropologists faced with the everyday violence of those who sell crack in East Harlem, New York City. African American adolescents in Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York City perceive racial violence as both within and against their spatial communities and deploy strategies of resistance, from gangs to graffiti to counter its corrosive influence. Even in the realm of the home, narratives of fear and insecurity are undermining the way that home places are perceived, linking 9/11, terrorism, fear of others, and criminal activity in such a way that many Americans feel the need to secure their homes, build safe rooms, and keep evacuation kits available at all times.

Global, Transnational and Translocal Spaces

Within urban anthropology, transnational processes are defined by Ulf Hannerz (1992) based on cultural flows organized by nations, markets, and movements (see Chapter 2, “Flows”). He criticizes world-systems analyses as being too simplified to reflect the complexity and fluidity of the “creolization” of post-colonial culture. From this perspective, global space is conceived of as the flow of goods, people, and services – as well as capital, technology, and ideas – across national borders and geographic regions, resulting in the deterritorialization of space; that is space detached from local places.

The notion of global deterritorialization, however, has come under considerable criticism by anthropologists in that the “role of capital in changing place notions of a borderless world misses much of the reality of capitalism” (Smart 1999: 380). Although capital has become more mobile and thus placeless to some extent, it has become more territorial in other places as a result of uneven development. Global flows bypass some poor residents without access to capital, entrapping them in disintegrating communities while entangling others. This spatial fragmentation of the city uses the decoupling of spaces and places as a framework for understanding the re-linking of elite spaces by infrastructure, the internet, and capital flows.

Anthropologists challenge a view of globalization as all encompassing and pervading every sector of society, by studying “the local” and examining the articulations of the global and the local (see Chapter 14, “Global Systems and Globalization”). For instance, global industrialization restructures the everyday lives and localities of factory workers, and the means by which new workers recreate meaning and community in the context of their transformed lives. Other examples of localizing or indigenizing the global include Ted Bestor’s (2004) ethnography of the Tsukiji wholesale fish market in Tokyo and Alan Smart’s (1999) study of local capitalism spaces created by foreign investment in China. Ethnographic studies of the displacing effects of global forces also reveal the power of individuals to reterritorialize the landscapes through pilgrimage and territorial claims based on memory.

Within anthropology, the term “transnational,” was first used to describe the way that immigrants “live their lives across borders and maintain their ties to home, even when their countries of origin and settlement are geographically distant” (Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton 1992: ix) (see Chapter 17, “Transnationality”). Part of this effort was to understand the implications of a multiplicity of social relations and involvements that span borders. Eric Wolf (1982) laid the theoretical groundwork in his landmark history of how the movement of capital and labor has transformed global relations since the 1400s, dispelling the myth that globalization is a recent phenomenon. However, while Wolf’s approach to the issue of global connections is seminal, it deals primarily with issues of power and its allocation, and only indirectly with the spaces of daily life. It is much later, through the detailed ethnographies of the rhythms of daily life in transnational migrant communities, that a sense of transnational urban space emerges.

Translocal spaces are also produced by other forms of cultural deterritorialization such as travel, tourism, and religious diaspora. Marc Augé (1995) considers the airport a non-place, a space of supermodernity, where customers, passengers, and other users are identified by names, occupation, place of birth, and address, but only upon entering and leaving. Airports along with superstores and railways stations are non-places that “do not contain any organic society” (1995: 112); social relations are suspended and this non-place becomes a site of coming and going.

Studies of migration and translocality emphasize the role of diaspora communities within the new geography of globalization. The technologies of time-space compression – such as the use of international cellphones, the internet, and bargain airfares – enable diaspora communities to survive, even at the margins of the global economy. The power of the internet to mediate transnational urbanism is a key element in the continuity of culture and social relationships between less developed parts of Africa, Asia, and Latin America, with developed regions of North America and Asia, but also between the metropole and the periphery. Secondary and mid-size cities are becoming more important as urban processes are seen as spaces of flows of information, labor, and capital. It is in these studies that urban anthropology returns to some of its earliest concerns with the urban to rural and migration circuits, but now drawing upon a new arsenal of theory and bolstered by a critical perspective based on political economic analysis and a spatialities framework as well as ethnographic sophistication.

CONCLUSION

Urban anthropology has undergone a major transition over the last 30 years, changing from a field that focused solely on small-scale societies and groups living in cities, to multilevel and spatial analyses of the urban processes and social relationships. Rather than viewing the city as a static context or setting,

it is conceived of as an urban region made up of complex interrelationships of places and a space of flows dependent on the whims of global capital. This transformation included changes in methodology (multi-sited ethnography and spatial analysis), history (incorporating a broader social science perspective), and substance (new objects and processes of study). The result is a vibrant field ready to take a fuller role in urban policy and planning debates armed with the unique ability to view the city from the insiders' and the outsiders' perspectives integrating both macro and micro understandings of urban processes.

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