TERRITORIES IN CRISIS

Architecture and Urbanism Facing Changes in Europe

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INTRODUCTION
The European territories described in this book seem to float in a sea of crumbs, making them alien to convincing forms of thought or design. Their fragility and density are closely related to the crisis they are experiencing. Crisis with different origins and different effects: a shift in the relationship between capital and labor; a tendency for falling profit rates; a more inflexible relationship between the economy and resources; climate change; population aging; increased inequality; and institutional crises. Their current state cannot be understood using time-honored topics such as history, geography, and urban planning; instead, it raises questions involving the redesign of space, rules, rights, and values in a time-lapse leading us further and further away from the twentieth century. The eight short paragraphs on the next few pages discuss several aspects of this gradual exit from the twentieth century. These are the theories we pursue in this book—theories that this book has a duty to support.

**Rethinking Europe**

Fifty years have passed since the Palermo conference sparked the brief adventure of Gruppo 63, one of the last literary avant-garde movements in Europe. Alberto Arbasino wrote the manifesto, *Gita a Chiasso*, illustrating the need to rethink Europe by shedding the conformism adopted by each national culture (Barilli and Guglielmi 1963). The inquiry presented here takes another look at Europe and its current, radically changed situation at a time when many people now focus exclusively on Asia, Africa, or South America; or at least this is what many architects and town planners do for reasons that are easy to understand.
STATE OF CRISIS AND THE PROJECT: THE HORIZONTAL METROPOLIS

Paola Viganò

Today, the relationship between a state of crisis and the possibility of a project must be approached without preconceptions, without the salvific pretension of design, but also without the cynicism that reduces and trivializes everything. The two texts that follow, “State of Crisis and the Project: The Horizontal Metropolis” and “Designing in Flanders” propose a point of view and a position. They are not homogeneous: the first can be interpreted as an introduction to the second more substantive text written together with Bernardo Secchi, as well as a continuation of a reflection on contemporary space and its aporias.

State of Crisis

In a text written in 2009, Jacqueline Barus-Michel stressed that ascertainment of a state of crisis always highlights moments of breakages in the structure, in social links, lifestyles, individuals’ representations and knowledge, revealing the destructuring of what are considered usual conditions. Barus-Michel describes how a state of crisis develops. I will use it to frame the period in which, together with Bernardo Secchi, we developed numerous projects for an unprecedented urban condition similar to the one that occurred during the same period in other parts of Europe and which, more recently, we have dubbed “the Horizontal Metropolis.” The aim is to explicitly make these considerations part of an interpretation of the European crisis and, in particular, of the crisis of the European city.
Cemetery of Kortrijk, Studio Bernardo Secchi & Paola Viganò, Belgium, 1994–2000 © Carine Demeter (Syb’l S Pictures)
A Flemish Autobiography

We began working in Flanders in 1989 when we took part in a competition for Hoog Kortrijk, to which we were invited along with Bob Van Reeth, Rem Koolhaas, and Stéphane Beel. The competition produced four interesting projects in which the theme—the construction of a science park—was interpreted in very different ways as a reflection on the new form of the contemporary city. Our project focused almost exclusively on designing open spaces, the spaces “in-between” buildings, and trying to interpret their relationship with the context. A “silent” project that perhaps we would have called “minimalist” at the time; a project in which the main theme was how to design open spaces for road traffic, parking, access to buildings, and, at the same time, a new type of public space that would make this area—a terrain with slight but perceptible differences in height—clearly legible. We won the competition, but nothing or almost nothing came of it. However, a few years later the Mayor of Kortrijk, Emmanuel De Bethune, asked us to indicate the places, projects, and priorities we considered important for the enhancement and transformation of the town. This led to the creation of what some consider the first strategic plan in Flanders; the plan never became an official document and remained on the Mayor’s shelf and perhaps also on the City Council’s, nevertheless many parts of the plan were constructed later—naturally, with projects also designed and implemented by other architects. We were entrusted with two of these projects: the Grote Markt and the new cemetery.
A crisis has significant implications on the disposal process. What is left of the fixed social capital associated with productive activities requires a new design approach. The attention paid to new life cycles changes conventional design paradigms: lifespan, size, functions, and use values.
HERITAGE AND RUINS
facilities project was finally completed (thanks to a huge economic and demographic growth). The local authorities now focused on the district; they created meeting places and activities for the elderly (bowls) and children (football fields, sports centers), schools, social and health services, and better local public transport (Bagnasco 1986). The district was not only safe, but also ensured social control. The social protection network is the last cog in the wheel of the Fordist model. The influential role of industrial power over the city’s public policies was a fait accompli and consolidated the new public-private alliance that was to characterize the city for many years to come. In addition, widespread industrial gigantism created a disproportionate town planning configuration, as well as a strong and not just spatial hierarchy: one got the impression that the inhabitants of Mirafiori saw themselves as FIAT workers rather than fellow citizens living in a neighborhood (Olmo 1997). In fact, the working class emerged in the industrial sector and thanks to their sheer numbers and strong social demands became one of the main players in the politics and economy of the city.

Inertia and Metamorphosis: The Unexpected Effects of the Crisis

In the eighties, just when the sociospatial situation seemed to work like a well-oiled machine, production was hard hit by a crisis. The slow agony of the automobile sector put paid to the season of the factory-city. Production and the urban model adopted in the district were inevitably and inexorably abandoned, proof that periods of crises play an important role in changing urban lifestyles (Harvey 1991). The crisis led to the radicalization of the process of abandonment; residential housing units and places in which fixed capital had previously been heavily invested began to slowly be abandoned and left empty. District services deteriorated and there was a drop in the number of retail and trade outlets; although the city was not far away, transportation became infrequent and erratic. In short, the social protection network created in the seventies slowly began to break down.

Today, production has been radically downsized, but the former territorial layout is still affected by unrelenting, permanent inertia: metabolizing this dismantling depends on the relationship between spaces, the economy, and society. The inert buildings and spaces veil the district’s gradual deterioration and decay, caused on the one hand by changes in ownership and, on the other, by the collapse of its social networks. Company policy states that the right to housing is the right to ownership. Over the years, this has caused values to crumble and the onset of a social immobility that has prevented a generational turnover in the district. All this took place while the dynamics of several economic mechanisms drained the work-related spaces that still had symbolic and relational value.

Without FIAT, Mirafiori is the most conspicuous example of social segregation. Production, the community, and private property not only defined the value of the heritage of the Fordist city, but also transformed an abstract space into a place (Augé 1995). It created a sort of factory prison that impressed its seal on the identity of the district and prevented the narration of a new story. The ghost of production still hovers over this urban space.
Since 2009, local social urban movements—“Associacions de Veïns i Veïnes de Barcelona”—have become increasingly important in Barcelona; in a sort of spontaneous, widespread, subsidiary, and dialectic rebellion, they have demanded to be able to use abandoned public spaces. They imbue these mostly old industrial areas with new meaning and purpose, thereby satisfying the needs and demands left unmet by public authorities. Can Batlló and the association “Plataforma Can Batlló és pel barri,” in the La Bordeta district, are excellent examples. The factory area became the site of social actions and relationships. A sort of social explosion replaced the loss of community—in the modern sense of the word—and confirmed the ongoing emergence of social niches that not only demand to be heard, but wish to rebuild the lost part of the city, reinvent services, create new public venues, and dialogue with the entire city. Bringing Can Batlló back to new life required battling against institutions and the market: sharing required sit-ins while conflict became a tool to redesign places in the city.

Interrupted Processes and Implications of the Crisis
Can Batlló and La Magoria were once a textile colony covering over 130,000 square meters. The colony, built in 1878 in the La Bordeta district of Barcelona, occupies an area of roughly 0.6 square kilometers. Can Batlló and the adjacent La Magoria district cover approximately 25 percent of that area. The district has a population of 18,727 inhabitants: 59 percent are aged between twenty-four and sixty-four; 22 percent are under twenty-three;
while 19 percent are older than sixty-five. Spanish residents account for 85.7 percent of the population, while the remaining 14.3 percent are foreigners chiefly from Ecuador, Bolivia, and Morocco. Older people living alone account for 21.4 percent of the population in the district, compared to 25.2 percent in the city (Ajuntament de Barcelona 2010).

The urbanization of La Bordeta spanned a period of fifty years. It began with the construction of the first small factories followed by the development of Can Batlló in 1878. It was an industrial working-class district, where unions and cooperatives established their headquarters; over the years, this setup turned the area into an extremely dynamic political district.

Immediately after the Civil War, the controversial entrepreneur Julio Ramonet bought the factory. When the textile industry fell into a slump, Ramonet turned the factory into 700 workshops and then rented them out to individual craftsmen (La Col 2013). The slow,
Today, we have a fairly good idea of what public space is in a modern city. It is Mulberry St. depicted by Abel Ferrara—full of bodies, gestures, agreements, and disagreements, but also with objects and places decorated for the feast day of St. Gennaro in the heart of Little Italy in New York (2009). It is also Trafalgar Square at night, portrayed by Claude Goretta and Alain Tanner in Nice Time (1957). Fifty years separate these two documentaries and in many ways they are not comparable; nevertheless, claustrophobic New York full of pavements and little bars, and London just before the evening shows are both entirely public space. A dilated and powerful space that conveys their basic traits: the magnetic potential to provide a reverse review of collective and individual stories and the vocation to incorporate the experiences and differences of those who cross them; including children, the elderly, military servicemen, middle-class citizens, couples, individuals, groups of friends. They are virtuous spaces of citizenship and interpersonal exchange—not only of words, but also gazes, gestures, interlocked hands, and aligned strides.

These are spaces that require a code of good conduct revealing the rules of a social game. Nighttime London and daytime New York are two (different) scenes of the “démocratie procedural,” which Touraine relates to the “patriotisme de la Constitution.” He provides a slightly menacing version, maintaining that it “ne se contente pas des règles formelles,” but “organise la représentation des intérêts, met en forme le débat public, institutionnalise la tolerance” (1997, 20). In this case, institutionalized tolerance recalls the sarcastic irony of
an author undoubtedly not one of Touraine favorites: Slavoj Žižek. For that matter, Ferrara wouldn’t have liked Touraine either (Touraine 1977; Žižek 2001).

Now that the twentieth century city is behind us, what has become of public space? Dramaturgy and stage design, meticulously studied by interactionist sociology and “rites of interaction” appear to refer to something that has been lost (Goffman 1974). Public space is no longer powerful, nor is it shaped by the measure, prudence, and tact required by the “negotiated order” of Goretta and Tanner’s Trafalgar Square, or its numerous representations. It is packed with temporary and contradictory actions: it spreads and at the same time loses its basic traits. Many actions fill and appropriate public space. In public space, we move slowly or in groups according to extravagant artistic performances. We run, we practice parkour, or other disciplines that use land and buildings as a prop for acrobatic movements. We sleep, eat, and study. We pray. We play in spaces equipped for other purposes, thereby reinventing spaces and games. We grow flowers and vegetables in every available nook and cranny. Space is filled either with recreational and artistic activities, or activities involving survival and all sorts of sharing. Often the former are conflictingly redefined: for example, gardening is used to stem the presence of marginalized populations.

Starting in 2008, many studies have produced repertoires, catalogues, and handbooks regarding the activities occupying public space (Zardini and Borasi 2009; Haydn and Temel 2006). They have redesigned the borders of a “minor public,” which uses space as it sees fit and in an extremely innovative manner (Bianchetti 2011). We don’t have to sign up to either the controversies or the celebrations; nor do we need to perform detailed anthropological studies to understand that we cannot write off public space even if it loses its overall, general dimension. It reemerges in a different form, in continuous effervescent episodes, movements, and actions that claim to represent the public in the contemporary city. It explodes, but not due to abandonment. It changes its statute and focuses not on conflict, but on conviviality; and on tolerance that, in its most extreme forms, ends in indifference and distraction (Bianchetti 2011b).

**Contemporary Public Spaces**

Several situations studied in the research project *Territories in Crisis* help to illustrate this change in hierarchies and values—and perhaps, to be more exact, in our acknowledgement of an overly celebrated effervescence.

Les Grottes, Geneva: a domesticated public space in which signs, small puppets, written words, and small buildings forcefully transmit familiarity and routine. The neighborhood echoes Lefebvre’s idea of use as appropriation, as modeling of a land that welcomes footsteps and engravings (2001). Public space in Les Grottes is not only riddled with signs, but also with carefully fenced spaces so that chickens can be raised in the heart of the city;
This article examines, from a contextual and situational viewpoint, the evolution of recent forms of urban social contention in Madrid in the context of the current crisis. I argue that these moments of commonality constitute a prototype for a new urbanity, based on the recursiveness of bodily practices where the conflictive and sharing bases of commonality are being reconciled and forged anew, establishing an alternative model for understanding social contention and reimagining the future evolution of shared urban space in European cities. I discuss aspects of these forms of conflict and sharing, together with changes that have taken place in the nature, practice, and paradigmatic position of public space in the city of Madrid. Furthermore, I consider these changes under the emergence of the prototype as a new paradigm that reedits the culture of the open city and invites us to requestion common public life in our contemporary European cities.

**Forms and Context**

In July 2013, the municipal government of Madrid approved the selling of more than 3,800 social housing units to real estate funds controlled by Goldman Sachs, Blackstone, and HIG Capital. At the same time—during the period 2011–2014—Madrid witnessed the advent of new social movements following a surge in 15M demonstrations and sit-ins in public squares, their extension to different neighborhoods, and their transition into, and involvement with, the so-called *mareas ciudadanas* and different civil rights movements, such as Plataforma de afectados por la hipoteca (PAH). More than 9,629 demonstrations
since the beginning of 2012 testify to the scale of this social contention (Spanish Ministry of Interior Affairs n.d.). Intense activity has been observed in the context of sustained social effervescence in southern European cities. Are these forms of protests simply reviving old urban struggles, or do they engage in forms of conflict and sharing capable of renewing our urban imaginary? Are we witnessing an act of futile nostalgia for an activism incapable of counteracting the ruthless invincibility of globalized capital, or is this a substantial reformulation of *civitas* that will eventually rearticulate the public sphere into shared urban space? In order to answer these divergent questions of conflict and sharing, our enquiry must correctly tackle two dimensions that have tended to be regarded as oppositional in their different declinations: context and form, structure, and situation.

Following Madrid’s metropolitan expansion (up to 2008), the implementation of an urban geography of fragmentation has been accompanied by the establishment of a state of exception, in practice denying access to the cohesive public space on which the urbanity of capitalist western democracies seemed to be founded. The recently approved new Citizen Security Law (December 2014) establishes the levying of fines for several kinds of protest, thereby increasing the pressure on civil pacific forms of protest and confirming the atmosphere of repression (Amnesty International 2014). Following the surge in protests, both the central government and the municipal government in Madrid tried to restrict the right to demonstrate in public space by establishing off-limit zones in the city center; it cited concerns such as the protection of cultural heritage, tourism, or priority issues of general interest, such as mass mobility. This approach was adopted along with a system of forced housing evictions carried out by the authorities and property owners—mostly private banks and state agencies holding the “toxic” real estate assets of nationalized banks. Evictions rose to 67,189 in 2013 (CGPJ 2013), 10 percent of which was in Madrid; this created a social tragedy condemned by the European Union Court of Justice.

With the state on the retreat, we move from the ashes of the welfare state into a realm of conflict, in which the apparently relinquishing public realm is subject to a new hegemonic role of private finance. The state has shifted from its role as a promoter of public structures of well-being, to a guardian controlling who owns and who uses urban space. As a result, public space is now subject to the reaffirmation of a historical pendular tension between state normativity and emergent popular sovereignty over common space.

**Structure and Situation: Public Space Unmasked**

The landscape of social contention in southern European cities is the result of the long capitulation of the project of public space—from its celebrated mythological essence of the European city to its dystopian image as a fragile tourist theme park surrounded by leaky security fences. However, the common place of the militarization of urban space and the policies of control (Graham 2010) does not seem to be happening today in suburbia. In Madrid, it is affecting the core of what was meant to be a place of maximum urbanity—
geographic identity. Blurring and mitigating any direct confrontation between different territorial entities leads to a gaping landscape. As a result, earth mounds are not only the formal consequence of two-dimensional urban planning, but also the corollary of a land use separating one function from the other.

Fourth. The segregated design of road profiles and devices combined with the partial abandonment of adjacent building—in favor of the hygienist logic of the pavilion building—has led to the decoupling of roads and buildings. In addition, the architectural and urban doctrine that dominated the first half of the twentieth century envisaged separating human activities according to distinct functional areas and assigning a particular program to each portion of the territory.

This zoning principle was subsequently reduced to a rudimentary land use management; it engendered segmentation of urban space into different functional enclaves: industrial areas, residential developments, shopping centers, research campuses, and business parks separated by intermodal links and other kinds of infrastructural sites. These places are characterized not only by the autonomy of the various functional entities, but also by the mutual independence of the buildings and traffic system; they are isolated within their vegetal margins and can only be accessed through a parking area directly connected to a major highway.

Topographical amnesia and the formal proliferation of solitary objects produce an artificial décor. As an idealized reproduction of nature, the garden still serves as a model for the domestication of the territory. Green space has emerged as a reference for any form of recent urbanization. In a two-dimensional design of the environment, flowerbeds, lawns, and clumped shrubs act as the lonely remains of the natural landscape that once surrounded the city. Confined along the façades, they somehow materialize a horizon that would have been pushed back against the wall.

Thus, the current trend in urban design tends to separate not only functional zones, traffic flows, signs, and messages, but also buildings and roads, as well as the artificial topography and neutralized ground that acts as the basis for the project. This design principle generates a juxtaposition of human settlements and paths that undermine the formal and cultural coherence of the contemporary city. It opens breaches in the perspective space that traditionally integrates the three dimensions of the ground and vertical planes in a single design. Beyond the malfunctions identified here, the modern design of the road profile and devices not only creates standards, but also produces an aesthetic and formal language. We can thus assume that the fragmentation of the urban locus is the new paradigm of what would be contemporary space. However, if the contemporary dense city is characterized by the immediate juxtaposition of heterogeneous environments, the nondense city gives form to discontinuous space by expressing dissociation.
How to Understand the Emergence of an Intermittent City ... What’s the Alternative?

By emphasizing the opening of the visual field, the two-dimensional treatment of urban space either reveals the absence or perhaps early evidence of a new common ground for the urban community. This upheaval in spatial and visual landmarks may be the basis of a new symbolic paradigm within which new forms of urban life can be elaborated. Indeed, although the scenographic approach reveals the segregation caused by the road articulation spaces, it also helps to highlight some of their latent qualities, as long as we consider these devices to be potentially animated spaces that can fully contribute to the quality of urban life. Therefore, a series of questions arises about the emergence of an intermittent city intrinsically characterized by the semantic, spatial, and programmatic discontinuity of contemporary urban space.

An analysis of this formal vocabulary not only helps to build a critique of the mostly functionalist road design practices, but also reveals the impact of their normative or dogmatic motivations. This first documentary step could then be supplemented by emphasizing the preconceptions guiding the work of city planners. The evolution of mobility corresponds to...
The Heart of the City: Towards the Humanisation of Urban Life: Humanization of urban life against the oppressions of mechanization and bureaucracy, Tyrwhitt et al. 1952, 158
strong relations to it—sprawl is a construction of a completely new landscape. In the Veneto region of northeastern Italy, the Secchi and Viganò research group and IUAV PhD students in Urbanism analyzed the territory, dividing it into different accessibility zones and finding greater potential for the use of trains. The project considers the possibility to transfer automobile traffic to trains and bicycles as a (re)emerging model for personal mobility—e.g., the Dutch experience—and proposes a radical change in the habits and lifestyles surrounding mobility in order to facilitate the inevitable transition from car mobility to a public system of mobility based on renewable energies. The current fragmentary spatial condition resulting from the process of modernization and individualized lifestyles could become a productive landscape and dispersed urban realm offering high-quality living conditions. The proposed nonhierarchical structure of the territory, beyond any center-periphery opposition, envisions an equitable society with perceived increase in the quality of life due to the proximity of green space, agricultural space, and public space.

**Critique of the Car behind Reflections on Public Space**

In the sixties, a universal longing for the qualities of traditional urban space led to a critique of the proliferation of fast roads and the car’s colonization of everyday life. Lewis Mumford’s *The Highway and the City* (1959) and *The City in History* (1961) and Lefebvre’s *Le droit à la ville* (1968) are early examples of this dissent. Echoing the views of Debord—the Situationist theses on traffic—Lefebvre argues that the construction of highways through cities and the enlargement of existing streets to meet the needs of increased motor traffic have resulted in the disintegration of city life and the disappearance of its communal forms, such as public parks, market places, et cetera. Lefebvre described this as the triumph of “geometric space” over “lived space” (Inglis 2004). In 1951, the CIAM congress³ “The Heart of the City” (Tyrwhitt et al. 1952)—focusing on the concept of human space and the figure of the pedestrian—acknowledged the right of the individual over the tyranny of mechanical tools and produced, as a long-term result, an encounter with the prewar CIAM functionalist movement, the recovery of a sociability related to the premodern city, and the critique of functionalism itself. Therein lies the origin of theoretical reflections on the notion of public space: partly as a corollary to critiques of car space and as a transposition of functionalism that evolved into the current advocacy of diversity. This is because today diversity is consistently acknowledged in spatial and social terms as a prerequisite to lively urban spaces, and as an essential part of a sustainable urban project. Public space as a corporeal, social space of the city; the main figure of this space, the pedestrian, is central to urban discourses and animates urban projects. On the other hand, the private car—the hard shell private bubble that allows its passengers to meet the city and at the same time avoid it (Lofland 1998)—is considered to be its antagonist, because what characterizes public space is the “pausability” inherent in pedestrian movement and the fleeting interactions it enables (Demerath and Levinger 2003). In her book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), Jane Jacobs analyzes the city’s parks, streets, sidewalks—in other words its public spaces—and specifically emphasizes this opposition. Her studies were instrumental in
CONCLUDING REMARKS

The territories discussed in this book represent spatial, social, and economic conditions that exist all over Europe. They are not examples, but simply recurring situations representative of today’s world. These case studies have not been used to propose a possible exit strategy from the current crisis, because we believe that good will or technical solutions are not the solution. Nor do we believe this crisis
will be over soon. So why then have we decided to report on these situations in Europe if, as recalled by Amin and Thrift in their *Arts of the Political*, Europe is but a small fragment of the world? We’d like to take time in these concluding remarks to clarify these two points.

Biella, the Costa del Sol, Les Grottes, Mirafiori, Batllò, the mareas in Madrid, the community land trust in Bruxelles, the Free Republique of San Lorenzo, Aubervilliers, Mirafiori, Centquatre and Place de la Republique, Falchera, Val Maira, and Val di Susa: our observation of these situations has allowed us to appreciate things that quantitative land use studies, or in-depth research on competition policies between cities and territories find difficult to express (although obviously multiple approaches
New conditions are an opportunity to resurvey European territories in crisis. This what we have done in this book using earlier, repeatedly mentioned studies, but ones we would still like to cite here. First and foremost Territori della condivisione, an important premise providing many substantive issues and research methods used in this inquiry, performed by urban planners and sociologists at the Politecnico di Torino and the Politecnico di Milano. The case study on Les Grottes, funded by the Fondazione Braillard Architectes and the EPFL, was a further opportunity to crystallize concepts and positions. The considerations by Bernardo Secchi and Paola Viganò about European territories have been included in numerous projects and papers and are always a fertile background against which we can gauge our questions, hypotheses, and opinions. Another research project that has, so to speak, put our work into perspective, is the long and important study by Arnaldo Bagnasco on the middle class.

Finally, a little more information about the work that has been carried out. Territories in crisis: architecture and urbanism facing the institutional and economic changes is a research project sponsored by the Compagnia di San Paolo and Politecnico di Torino with the École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL) during 2013 and 2014. The project was supervised by Cristina Bianchetti (DIST, POLITO) together with Elena Cogato Lanza, Tutor of the University Partner, (LAB-U, EPFL).

The research involved a continuous exchange between the two universities. Team members spent study periods in each other’s universities as Visiting Researchers. Numerous public seminars and debates were organized during these periods. They include: the International Public Seminar: “Territories in crisis. Norms, rights, values” (Lausanne, June 16–17, 2014) and the International Masterclass “Territories in crisis. Architecture and Urbanism facing the institutional and economic changes” (Turin, September 3–5, 2014). During the Masterclass, forty-five planned papers were presented by team members, the PhD candidates from SCUDO (POLITO), EDAR (EPFL) and the PhD School of Venice (IUAV). Numerous scholars participated, either as lecturers or discussants. The Seminars and Masterclass were supported by the blog Shared territories / Territories in crisis.

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