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# Posthuman, All Too Human

## Towards a New Process Ontology

*Rosi Braidotti*

### **Cyborgs, Companion Species and Nomadic Subjects**

READ DONNA Haraway's work as Continental philosophy, notably the French tradition of bodily materialism that argues, with Georges Canguilhem, that any theory of subjectivity worthy of its name must take into account the embodied and organic structure of the subject. Contrary to Bruno Latour, Haraway perpetuates a tradition of thought which emphasizes the importance of the subject in terms of both ethical and political accountability. In this regard, she contributes to critical theory as a discipline of thought as well as to the social criticism of science. I also consider Haraway's thought as my travel companion across multiple nomadic paths of reflection and practice. Her texts constitute a pioneering effort to set up a connection between the culture of contemporary biotechnological sciences and that of the human and social sciences. This project is complicated by the fact that, in the historical era of advanced postmodernity, the very notion of 'the human' is not only de-stabilized by technologically mediated social relations in a globally connected world, but it is also thrown open to contradictory redefinitions of what exactly counts as human. Haraway, not unlike Deleuze and Guattari (1972, 1980), takes into consideration also the non-human actors in a geopolitical, but also in an eco-philosophical manner.

I would consequently classify Haraway's work as 'high post-humanism' and immediately qualify that statement by pointing out a twofold dimension within this complex category: the first concerns the philosophical post-humanism that is the trademark of the post-structuralist generation; the second is a more targeted form of post-anthropocentrism that is not as widespread. Haraway is very cautious about the term 'post-human', as the interview in the present issue clearly shows. She gives priority instead to the accountability for historical aspects of European culture, like colonialism

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and fascism, which are in open contradiction with Europe's stated beliefs in humanist ideals and principles. Donna Haraway sums up admirably this mixture of affects:

Shaped as an insider and an outsider to the hegemonic power and discourses of my European and North American legacies, I remember that anti-Semitism and misogyny intensified in the Renaissance and the Scientific Revolution of early modern Europe, that racism and colonialism flourished in the traveling habits of the cosmopolitan Enlightenment and that the intensified misery of billions of men and women seems organically rooted in the freedoms of transnational capitalism and technoscience. But I also remember the dreams and achievements of contingent freedoms, situated knowledges and relief of suffering that are inextricable from this contaminated triple historical heritage. I remain a child of the Scientific Revolution, the Enlightenment and technoscience. (1997: 3)

I see Haraway as pursuing in a feminist way the line about bodily materiality, though she speaks the language of science and technology rather than that of post-metaphysical philosophy. She is an utterly non-nostalgic post-human thinker: her conceptual universe is the high-technology world of informatics and telecommunications. In this respect, she is conceptually part of the same epistemological tradition as Bachelard, for whom the scientific *ratio* is not necessarily hostile to the humanistic approaches and values. Moreover, in this line of thinking the practice of science is not seen as narrowly rationalistic, but rather allows for a broadened definition of the term, to include the play of the unconscious, dreams and the imagination in the production of scientific discourse. Following Foucault (1975), Haraway draws our attention to the construction and manipulation of docile, knowable bodies in our present social system. She invites us to think of what new kinds of bodies are being constructed right now; that is, what kind of gender-system is being constructed under our very noses.

The feminist post-anthropocentric approach, however, also challenges the androcentrism of the post-structuralists' corporeal materialism. Thus, while sharing a great deal of Foucault's premises about the modern regime of truth as 'bio-power', Haraway also questions his redefinition of power. Haraway notes that contemporary power does not work by normalized heterogeneity any more, but rather by networking, communication redesigns and multiple interconnections. She concludes that Foucault 'names a form of power at its moment of implosion. The discourse of biopolitics gives way to techno-babble' (Haraway, 1991: 245, footnote 4). Two points are noteworthy here: first, that Haraway analyses the contemporary scientific revolution in more radical terms than Foucault does, mostly because she bases it on first-hand knowledge about today's technology. Haraway's training in biology and sociology of science are very useful here. By comparison with her approach, Foucault's analysis of the disciplining of bodies appears already out of date, apart from being, of course, intrinsically androcentric.

Haraway raises a point that Deleuze (1986) also noted in his analysis of Foucault, namely that the Foucauldian diagrams of power describe what we have already ceased to be; like all cartography, they act a posteriori and therefore fail to account for the situation here and now. Whereas Foucault's analysis rests on an early 20th-century view of the production system, Haraway inscribes her analysis of the condition of women into an up-to-date analysis of the post-industrial system of production. Arguing that white capitalist patriarchy has turned into the 'informatics of domination' (Haraway, 1991: 162), Haraway suggests that women have been cannibalized by the new technologies and have disappeared from the field of visible social agents. The post-industrial system makes it urgent to invent a new politics on the basis of a more adequate understanding of how the contemporary subject functions.

Haraway's cyborg inserts an oppositional consciousness at the heart of the debate on the new technological societies currently being shaped, in such a way as to highlight issues of gender and sexual difference within a much broader discussion about survival and social justice. More than ever, therefore, the question of power relations and of ethical and political resistance emerges as relevant in the age of informatics of domination.

This philosophical post-humanism does not, therefore, result in anti-foundationalism. It rather stresses the need for process ontology. Thinking is a nomadic activity, which takes place in the transitions between potentially contradictory positions. It is not topologically bound, especially in the age of the global economy and telematic networks, but this does not make it ungrounded, like a view from nowhere. To be in process or transition does not place the thinking subject outside history or time: postmodernity as a specific moment of our historicity is a major location that needs to be accounted for. A location is an embedded and embodied memory: it is a set of counter-memories, which are activated by the resisting thinker against the grain of the dominant representations of subjectivity. A location is a materialist temporal and spatial site of co-production of the subject, and thus anything but an instance of relativism. The politics of location, or situated knowledges, rests on process ontology to posit the primacy of relations over substances.

Donna Haraway's work dislocates the centrality of the human, in favor of the in/non/post-human and of bio-centered egalitarianism. Thus, in her criticism of the exploitative logic of Western techno-sciences from within, Haraway (1997) stresses a number of crucial features. The first is power as a dynamic web of interconnections or hybrid contaminations, as a principle of radical non-purity. The second is the refusal to fall into the pitfall of the classical nature/culture divide: there is no natural *telos* or order, as distinct from technological mediation. In order to restructure our collective relationship to the new nature/culture compound of contemporary techno-sciences, Haraway calls for a renewed kinship system, radicalized by concretely affectionate ties to the non-human 'others'. Haraway (1992) argues that the subject-object, nature-culture divides are linked to patriarchal, oedipal

familial narratives. Against them, she mobilizes an enlarged sense of community, based on empathy, accountability and recognition (Haraway, 1997). Moreover, she extends these prerogatives to non-human agents or subjects, such as animals, plants, cells, bacteria and the Earth as a whole.

### **Nomadic Subjects of the Chaos/Cosmos Unite!**

Both Deleuze and Haraway refuse to underplay the contradictions and discontinuities between the human and the non-human environment. They also refuse to romanticize the interaction between them. This sentimental glorification of the humans' proximity with animals is especially problematic in contemporary culture, due as much to the social climate of resurgent socio-biological determinism as to the culture of pets. Deleuze's concept of the becoming-animal is a radical conceptual version of anti-anthropocentrism (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980). There is no metaphorical dimension in Deleuze's notion of the becoming-animal – nor is there the aporetic loop of deconstructive thinking, which, in Derrida (2002) for instance, reduces animality to a general figuration of Alterity. Contrary to what Haraway herself states in the interview in this issue, I do not find much resonance between Derrida's linguistically mediated scheme of deconstruction and Haraway's empowering figurations. Nor do I see much in common between Haraway's robust re-grounding of praxis in bio-semiotic affinity and Derrida's celebration of undecidability. As in the case of Wolfe's (2003) work, this approach perpetuates the metaphorical use of animal imagery in a representational mode which is far less convincing than Haraway's (1997) trans-species egalitarianism and social bonding. I find a far deeper alliance between her companion species and the philosophy of multiple becoming that lies at the heart of my nomadic subject, which is simultaneously materialist, therefore not textual, and neo-literal, that is to say resolutely not metaphorical. Haraway shares with Deleuze two key features: serious neo-foundational materialism on the one hand and a rigorous theory of relationality on the other.

As a hybrid, or body-machine, the cyborg, or the companion species, is a connection-making entity; a figure of interrelationality, receptivity and global communication that deliberately blurs categorical distinctions (human/machine; nature/culture; male/female; oedipal/non-oedipal). It allows Haraway to think specificity without falling into relativism in the quest for adequate representation of a generic post-naturalistic humanity. Crucial to this operation is the rejection of a semiotic method of approach. In my reading, the function of figurations such as the cyborg or the companion species is not abstract but, rather, political. It suggests how we should go about re-thinking about the unity of the human being. We need new forms of literacy to decode today's world. Figurations also entail a discursive ethics: that one cannot know properly, or even begin to understand, that towards which one has no affinity. Critical intelligence, for Haraway, is a form of sympathy. One should never criticize that which one is not complicitous with: criticism must be conjugated in a non-reactive mode,

a creative gesture, so as to avoid the oedipal plot of phallo-logocentric theory.

In nomadic thought, a radically immanent intensive body is an assemblage of forces, or flows, intensities and passions that solidify in space, and consolidate in time, within the singular configuration commonly known as an ‘individual’ self. This intensive and dynamic entity does not coincide with the enumeration of inner rationalist laws, nor is it merely the unfolding of genetic data and information. It is rather a portion of forces that is stable enough to sustain and to undergo constant, though non-destructive, fluxes of transformation.

### **Anti-Oedipus**

There is a deep anti-Oedipal sensibility at work in Haraway, as in Deleuze, though in her case, and by her own admission, it comes close to resistance against psychoanalysis (Penley and Ross, 1991). I agree with Haraway that the imaginary surrounding psychoanalytic definitions of the unconscious is deeply conservative, family-bound and heterosexist. But then, speaking as a cartographer, I think this is a perfectly adequate reflection of our culture and its dominant norms, so I would never blame psychoanalysis for bringing the bad news that we live under a phallogocentric regime. I will quarrel with psychoanalysis, however, when it argues for the historical necessity and immutability of the phallogocentric regime. In opposition to this political conservatism, I choose the transformative politics which feminism best exemplifies, and philosophical nomadism helps to theorize. Thus, Haraway’s feminist cyborg project aims at dislodging the Oedipal narratives from their culturally hegemonic positions and thus diminishing their power over the construction of identity. Firmly located inside the belly of the beast of contemporary techno-culture and its mutant or hybrid social imaginary, Haraway wants to fight back by positing affirmative and empowering figurations for the new interaction with animals, mutants and machines, which is constitutive of our historical era.

The strength of Haraway’s project is its inspirational force: she wants to invent a new discourse for the unconscious, one that can reflect the conditions of our historicity. The counter-figurations for this non-oedipalized unconscious trace a sort of becoming-animal: the cyborg, the coyote, the trickster and the oncomouse produce alternative structures of otherness. Just like Deleuze, Haraway has little patience for the linguistic paradigm within which the unconscious has been conceptualized, with its intrinsic binaries, the equation of desire with lack and the laws of displacement, condensation and exclusion. Haraway, not unlike my nomadic subject, prefers instead multiplicities and multiply displaced identities. Non-linearity, non-fixity and non-unitary subjectivity are the priority, and they are situated in close proximity to woman, the native, the dispossessed, the abused, the excluded, the ‘other’ of the high-tech clean and efficient bodies that contemporary culture sponsors. This is comparable to Deleuze’s

attempts to rethink the becoming-animal as a figuration for the humanoid hybrids we are becoming.

Donna Haraway proposes to start rethinking this historical condition in a more pragmatic and positive manner from the figuration of oncomouse as the first patented animal in the world, a transgenic organism created for the purposes of research. The oncomouse is the techno-body par excellence: it has been created for the purpose of profit-making trafficking between the laboratories and the market place, and thus navigates between patenting offices and the research benches. Haraway wants to establish and emphasize a sense of kinship and connection with this transgenic animal. Calling her 'my sibling . . . male or female, s/he is my sister' (1997: 79), Haraway stresses also the extent to which oncomouse is both a victim and a scapegoat, a Christ-like figure that sacrifices herself in order to find the cure for breast cancer and thus save the lives of many women: a mammal rescuing other mammals. Because the oncomouse breaks the purity of lineage, she is also a spectral figure: the never-dead that pollutes the natural order simply by being manufactured and not born. S/he is, in my terms, a cyber-teratological apparatus that scrambles the established codes and thus destabilizes the subject: a nomadic device.

This implicated or non-innocent way to approach the oncomouse is symptomatic of Haraway's project, which contains a cognitive, as well as an ethical angle. It is about thinking across established categories, such as nature/culture, born/man-made, but also about criticizing commodity fetishism and the so-called market economy in its corporate and global phase. The ethical part of the project concerns the creation of a new kinship system: a new social nexus and new forms of social connection with these techno-others. What kinds of bonds can be established and how can they be sustained?

In her recent work on 'companion species' (2003), Donna Haraway draws a direct line between the early figurations of the cyborg and of oncomouse on the one hand, and companion species like dogs on the other. They mark the shifting boundaries of very affective and dynamic kinship relations. For Haraway, these relations need to be redefined in the context of a techno-scientific world that has replaced the traditional natural order with a nature–culture compound. An epistemological question therefore generates a new ethical dimension. Accordingly, the human–animal relation needs to be lifted out of the Oedipal and infantilizing narrative within which it has historically been confined. As a nature–culture compound, a dog – not unlike other products of techno-science – is a radical other, albeit a significant other. We need to devise a symbolic kinship system that matches this complexity. This is not a reference to the literary bestiary as an established genre, with its own grammar and a metaphorical reference to animals like letters in an alternative alphabet (Braidotti, 2002). Something less sophisticated and more material is occurring in the contemporary, processes of becoming-animal, which have nothing to do with metaphors of animality.

It is at this level that a sort of dissymmetry occurs between Haraway and Deleuze: both acknowledge that the strength of animals rests on the fact that they are immanent to their territories and environmentally bound, but they negotiate their next move differently. Donna Haraway moves a step beyond the Oedipal configuration of the culture of familiar pets by proposing a new kinship system that includes ‘companion species’ alongside other siblings and relatives. In Deleuze’s philosophical nomadism, on the other hand, this proximity is returned to the territorial materialist foundations from whence it came. *Zoe*, or the generative force of non-human life, rules through a trans-species and transgenic interconnection, or rather a chain of connections, which can best be described as an ecological philosophy of non-unitary, embodied subjects and of multiple belongings. It is indeed the case, as Haraway suggests in her interview, that at times Deleuze’s texts on the becoming-woman/animal can be problematic, if not downright disappointing. I have commented extensively on this in my own work. I happen to believe, however, that this is not a tragedy. Deleuze is truly anti-oedipal also and especially in the delicate issue of the reception of his own work. There are no Deleuzeans, as Costantin Boundas (Boundas and Olkowski, 1994) rightly put it; there are only people who engage with Deleuze’s thought, figurations and intellectual intensities – in order to construct alternative ways of thinking. If the aim of critical theory is to create new concepts, then the question is whether nomadism can be an inspiring and empowering force or not. In other words: for us nomadic subjects there is no faithful allegiance to his master’s voice, but only joyful acts of disobedience and gentle but resolute betrayal. I happen to think that this is also the best way to read Haraway’s own texts and that all imitators, or repetitors, are doomed from the start.

### **The Positivity of Monsters**

Haraway’s cyborgs, companion species and other figurations, read alongside Deleuze’s rhizomes, suggest that it is crucial to invent conceptual schemes that allow us to think the unity and the interdependence of the human, the bodily and its historical ‘others’ at the very point in time when these others return to dislocate the foundations of the humanistic worldview.

One needs to turn to ‘minor’, not to say marginal and hybrid genres, such as science fiction, science fiction horror and cyber punk, to find fitting cultural illustrations of the changes and transformations that are taking place in the forms of relations available in our post-human present. Low cultural genres, like science fiction, are mercifully free of grandiose pretensions – of the aesthetic or cognitive kind – and thus end up being a more accurate and honest depiction of contemporary culture than other, more self-consciously ‘representational’ genres. The quest for positive social and cultural representations of hybrid, monstrous, abject and alien others in such a way as to subvert the construction and consumption of pejorative differences, makes the science fiction genre an ideal breeding ground to explore our relation to what Haraway (1992) describes affectionately as ‘the promises of monsters’.



Haraway's distinctive and idiosyncratic writing style expresses the force of the de-centering that she is operating at the conceptual level, forcing the readers to re-adjust, or perish. Nowhere is the empowering force more visible than in Haraway's treatments of animals, machines and the monstrous, hybrid 'others'. Deeply immersed in contemporary culture, science fiction and cyber punk included, Haraway is fascinated by the difference embodied by reconstructed, mutant or altered others. Her techno-monsters contain enthralling promises of possible re-embodiments and actualized differences. Multiple, heterogeneous, uncivilized, they show the way to multiple virtual possibilities. The cyborg, the monster, the animal – the classical 'other than' the human are thus emancipated from the category of pejorative difference and shown forth in a more positive light. Haraway's intimate knowledge of technology is the tool that facilitates this qualitative leap; in this respect, she is a true cyber-teratologist.

The hyper-reality of the nomadic or cyborg post-human predicament does not wipe out politics or the need for political resistance: it just makes it more necessary than ever to work towards a radical redefinition of political action. Moreover, post-human embodiment is written into the cash-nexus, as Chela Sandoval (1999) also pointed out. Cyberspace is a highly contested social space that exists parallel to increasingly complex social realities. The clearest exemplification of the social powers of these technologies is the flow of money through computer-governed stock exchanges that always work and never sleep, the world over. This flow of pure data spells the decline of the master-narratives of modernism, but, as Bukatman (1993) astutely observes, it also constitutes a sort of master-narrative of its own, which spells the decline of humanism and the dawn of the age of post-humanity.

Moreover, capital harps on and trades in body fluids: the cheap sweat and blood of the disposable workforce throughout the Third World; but also, the wetness of desire of First World consumers as they commodify their existence into over-saturated stupor. Hyper-reality does not wipe out class relations: it just intensifies them. Postmodernity rests on the paradox of simultaneous commodification and conformism of cultures, while intensifying disparities among them, as well as structural inequalities.

An important aspect of this situation is the omnipotence of the visual media. Our era has turned visualization into the ultimate form of control. This marks not only the final stage in the commodification of the scopic, but also the triumph of vision over all the other senses. It is also something of special concern from a feminist perspective, because it tends to reinstate a hierarchy of bodily perception which overprivileges vision in relation to other senses, especially touch and sound. The primacy of vision has been challenged by feminist theories, which have inspiring things to say about scopophilia, that is to say a vision-centred approach to thought, knowledge and science. In a psychoanalytic perspective, this takes the form of a critique of the phallogocentric bias that is built into vision. Thus Irigaray (1974) links it to the pervasive powers of the masculine symbolic. Fox Keller (1992) reads it instead as a rapacious drive towards cognitive penetration

of the ‘secrets of nature’, which bears a direct link to the social and psychic construction of masculinity. In a more socio-political framework, Haraway (1991) attacks the priority which our culture gives to the logocentric hold of disembodied vision, which is best exemplified by the satellite/eye in the sky. She opposes to it an embodied and therefore accountable redefinition of the act of seeing as a form of connection to the object of vision, which she defines in terms of ‘passionate detachment’.

There is consequently little time or space for nostalgia. Deleuze’s hybrid nomadic selves; the multiple feminist-operated becoming-woman of women; Irigaray’s woman as not-one; Haraway’s cyborgs, not unlike Cixous’s new Medusa (1975), are often rendered in the old-fashioned social imaginary as monstrous, hybrid, scary deviants. What if what was at fault here, however, were the very social imaginary that can *only* register changes of this magnitude on the panic-stricken moralistic register of deviancy? What if these unprogrammed-for others were forms of subjectivity that have simply shrugged off the shadow of binary logic and negativity and have moved on? The process of transformation of the subject goes on and we need process ontology to provide adequate accounts of it.

### Neo-asceticism

Affectivity plays a big role in both Haraway’s work and my nomadic subject: both invent a new conceptual style that refuses to engage in negative criticism for its own sake and acts instead from positive and empowering relationships to texts, authors and ideas. The emphasis falls on a cognitive brand of empathy, or intense affinity: it is the capacity for compassion, which combines the power of understanding with the force to endure in sympathy with a people, all of humanity, the planet and civilization as a whole. It is an extra-personal and a trans-personal capacity, which should be driven away from any universalism and grounded instead in the radical immanence of a sense of belonging to and being accountable for a community, a people and a territory.

This ethical line of transversality produces a distinct ‘theoretical style’. For instance, Deleuze’s style is compassionate, empathic yet also very dry and rigorous. He does stress the positive or joyful aspects of a philosopher’s work, stressing the effects of their thought, much as a painter would comment on the quality of a landscape. There is something precise and distant, uncompromising and unsentimental about it. It is indeed an impersonal, ascetic style, as sharp as a cartographer’s gaze, but as involved as a lover’s. The style is a philosopher’s conceptual persona, his metamorphic body: that which s/he is destined to become. It acts as a form of resistance against the pervasiveness of the doxa and also as a strategy in institutional life. Social institutions tend to generate, instill and reward the reproduction of negative passions forcing the oedipal subjugated participants to labor under the twin logic of narcissism and paranoia. This ability to disconnect from the paranoid-narcissistic-self-nexus, so as to activate a more affirmative set of passions enacts simultaneously an act of withdrawal (a minus)

and of addition (a plus). The subject subtracts him/herself from the reactive affects by stepping out of the negativity circuit. By virtue of this s/he transcends negativity, thereby generating and making room for more affirmative forces. This ascetic practice produces both a vision of the self and a role for the intellectual which consists not in leading the opinions (*doxa*), legislating the truth (*dogma*) or administering the protocols of intellectual life, but rather in creating and disseminating new concepts and ideas. It is not a matter of representing others, or speaking on their behalf, but rather about injecting doses of positivity into institutional and academic practice, so as to turn it into an instrument of production of the new. The link between reason and the imagination, theory and passion is crucial to this project.

Something analogous to this asceticism is at work in Donna Haraway's choice of the figuration of the 'modest witness' to describe the activity of critical thinking. In keeping with her preference for situated and partial forms of knowledge, Haraway (1997) offers the notion of modesty as a form of accountability, open-ended dialogue and critical thinking that aims at witnessing, not at judging. She specifies that not only is a feminist notion of modesty not allergic to power, but also that it provides an enlarged definition of scientific objectivity as a local, partial and yet valuable achievement. 'The approach I am trying to work for', she states, 'is rigorously committed to testing and attesting. To engage in and understand that this is always an interpretative, engaged, contingent, fallible engagement. It is never a disengaged account' (Haraway, 2000: 160). Self-consciously 'consumed by the project of materialized refiguration' (1997: 23), Haraway rethinks the position of the researcher and the critical thinker in terms of empathy and affinity. The 'modest witness' is neither detached nor uncaring, but a border-crossing figure who attempts to recontextualize his/her own practice within fast-changing social horizons. Accepting the techno-present without falling victim to its brutality; yearning for knowledge and depth in a fast-moving infotainment-consuming culture; aspiring to social justice in a world of global inequalities – these are some of the ethical values embodied in Haraway's vision of the subject. Refusing hegemonic positions, while accounting for clear disparities in access and means, is a way of reformulating knowledge in a techno-scientific world. Modesty and a strong imagination are the key virtues.

The prophetic dimension is alive and well in Donna Haraway's work, which demands epistemological and political respect for critical thought where creativity would be unimaginable without some visionary or spiritual fuel. This is post-secular thought at its best.

Prophetic, nomadic or visionary minds are thinkers of the future. The future as an active object of desire propels us forth and we can draw from it the strength and motivation to be active in the here and now of a present that hangs on in between the 'no longer' and the 'not yet' of advanced post-modernity. The present is always the future present: it will have made a positive difference in the world. Only the yearning for sustainable futures can construct a liveable present. The anticipation of endurance, of making

it to a possible 'tomorrow', transposes energies from the future back into the present. This is how sustainability enacts modes of creative becoming in a non-entropic model of energy-flow, and hence of transferral of desire (Braidotti, 2002, 2006). Drawing energy from the thinkability of the future means that our desires are sustainable to the extent that they engender the conditions of possibility for the future. In order to get there, a nomadic subject position of flow and multi-layeredness is a major facilitator. This is not a leap of faith, but an active transposition, a transformation at the in-depth level, a change of culture akin to genetic mutations, but registered also at the ethical level. In this project, cyborgs and nomadic subjects are companion species that endure.

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